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VOL. II.



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# ARMOREL OF LYONESSE

*A Romance of To-day*

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF 'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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# ARMOREL OF LYONESSE

## *PART II*

### CHAPTER I

#### SWEET COZ

‘I suppose,’ said Philippa, ‘that we were obliged to ask her.’

‘Well, my dear,’ her mother replied, ‘Mr. Jagenal is an old friend and when ——’ Her voice dropped, and she did not finish the sentence. It is absurd to finish a sentence which is understood.

‘Perhaps she will not do anything very outrageous.’

‘Well, my dear, Mr. Jagenal distinctly said that her manner——’ Again she left



the sentence unfinished. Perhaps it was her habit.

‘As she bears our name and comes from our place we can hardly deny the cousinship. In a few minutes, however, we shall know the worst.’

Philippa, dressed for dinner, was standing before the fire, tapping the fender impatiently with her foot, and playing with her fan. A handsome girl of three or four and twenty : handsome, not pretty, if you please, nor lovely. By no means. Handsome, with a kind of beauty which no painter or sculptor would assign to Lady Venus, because it lacked softness ; nor to Diana, because that huntress, chaste and fair, was country-bred, and Philippa was of the town—urban. The young lady was perfectly well satisfied with her own style of beauty. If she exaggerated a little its power, that is a common feminine mistake. The exaggeration brings to dress a moral responsibility. Philippa was dressed this evening in a creamy white silk, which had the effect of softening a face and manner

somewhat cold and even hard. The young men of the period complained that Philippa was stand-offish. Certainly she did not commit the mistake, too common among girls, of plunging straight off into sympathetic interest with every young man. Philippa waited for the young men to interest her, if they could. Generally, they could not. And, while many girls listen with affected deference to the opinions of the young man, Philippa made the young man receive hers with deference. These plain facts show, perhaps, why Philippa, at twenty-four, was still free and unengaged.

In appearance she was tall—all young ladies who respect themselves are tall in these days : her features were clearly cut, if a little pronounced : her hazel eyes were intellectually bright, though cold : her hair, the least marked feature, was of a common brown colour, but she treated it so as to produce a distinctive effect : her mouth was fine, though her lips were rather thin : her figure was correct, though Venus herself would have

preferred more of it, and, perhaps, that more flexible. But it is the commonplace girl, we know, who runs to plumpness.

She was dressed with greater care than usual this evening, because 'people were coming, but not to dinner. The only guests at dinner were to be one Mr. Jagenal, the well-known family solicitor, of Lincoln's Inn, and a certain far-off cousin, named Armored Rosevean, from the Scilly Isles, and her companion and chaperon, one Mrs. Jerome Elstree—unknown.

'My dear,' her mother began, 'you are too desponding. Mr. Jagenal assured your father——' She dropped her voice again.

'Oh! He is an old bachelor. What does he know? Our cousin comes from Scilly. So did we. It does very well to talk of coming from Scilly, as if it was something grand, but I have been looking into a book about it. Old families of Scilly, we say. Why, they have never been anything but farmers and smugglers. And our cousin, I hear, is actually a small tenant-farmer—a



flower-farmer—a kind of market-gardener! She grows daffodils and jonquils and anemones and snowdrops, and sells them. Very likely the daffodils on our table have come from her farm. Perhaps she will tell us about the price they fetch a dozen. And she will inform us at dinner how she counts the stalks and makes out the bills.'

'Absurd! She is an heiress. Mr. Jagenal says——'

'An heiress? How can she be an heiress?' Philippa repeated, with scorn. 'She inherits the lease of a little flower-farm. The people of Scilly are all quite, quite poor. My book says so. Some years ago the Scilly folk were nearly starving.'

'Your book must be wrong, Philippa. Mr. Jagenal says that the girl has a respectable fortune. When a man of his experience says that, he means ——' Here her voice dropped again.

'Well; the island heiress will go back, I dare say, to her inheritance.'

At this point Mr. Jagenal himself was

announced—elderly, precise, exact in appearance and in language.

‘You have not yet seen your cousin?’ he asked.

‘No. She will be here immediately, I suppose.’

‘Your cousin came to our house five years ago. My late partner received her. She brought a letter from a clergyman then at the Scilly Islands. She was sixteen, quite ignorant of the world, and a really interesting girl. She had inherited a very handsome fortune. My late partner found her tutors and guardians, and she has been travelling and learning. Now she has come to London again. She chooses to be her own mistress, and has taken a flat. And I have found a companion for her—widow of an artist—our young friend Alec Feilding knew about her—name of Elstrec. I think she will do very well.’

‘Alec knew her? He has never told me of any lady of that name.’ Philippa looked a little astonished.

Then the girl of whom they were talking, with the companion in question, appeared.

You know how one forms in the mind a whole image, or group of images, preparatory; and how these shadows are all dispelled by the appearance of the reality. At the very first sight of Armorel, Philippa's prejudices and expectations—the vision of the dowdy rustic, the half-bred island savage, the uncouth country maiden—all vanished into thin air. New prejudices might arise—it is a mistake to suppose that because old prejudices have been cleared away there can be no more—but, in this case, the old ones vanished. For while Armorel walked across the room, and while Mrs. Rosevean stepped forward to welcome her, Philippa made the discovery that her cousin knew how to carry herself, how to walk, and how to dress. Girls who have learned these three essentials have generally learned how to talk as well. And a young lady of London understands at the first glance whether a

strange young person, her sister in the bonds of humanity, is also a lady. As for the dress, it showed genius either on the part of Armorel herself or of her advisers. There was genius in the devising and invention of it. But genius of this kind one can buy. There was the genius of audacity in the wearing of it, because it was a dress of the kind more generally worn by ladies of forty than of twenty-one. And it required a fine face and a good figure to carry it off. Ladies will quite understand when I explain that Armorel wore a train and bodice of green brocaded velvet: the sleeves and the petticoat trimmed with lace. You may see a good deal of lace—of a sort—on many dresses; but Philippa recognised with astonishment that this was old lace, the finest lace in the world, of greater breadth than it is now made—lace that was priceless—lace that only a rich girl could wear. There were also pearls on the sleeves: she wore mousquetaire gloves—which proved many things: there were bracelets on her wrists,



and round her neck she had a circlet of plain red gold—it was the torque found in the kistvaen on Samson, but this Philippa did not know. And she observed, taking in all these details in one comprehensive and catholic glance of mind and eye, that her cousin was a very beautiful girl indeed, with something Castilian in her face and appearance—dark and splendid. For a simple dinner she would have been overdressed; but considering the reception to come afterwards, she was fittingly arrayed. She was accompanied by her companion—Philippa might have remembered that one must be an heiress in order to afford the luxury of such a household official. Mrs. Jerome Elstree was almost young enough to want a chaperon for herself, being certainly a good deal under thirty. She was a graceful woman of fair complexion and blue eyes: if Armored had desired a contrast to herself she could not have chosen better. She wore a dress in the style which is called, I believe, second mourning. The dress sug-

gested widowhood, but no longer in the first passionate agony—widowhood subdued and resigned.

The hostess rose from her chair and advanced a step to meet her guests. She touched the fingers of Mrs. Elstree. ‘Very pleased, indeed,’ she murmured, and turned to Armored. ‘My dear cousin’—she seized both her hands, and looked as well as spoke most motherly. ‘My dear child, this is, indeed, a pleasure! And to think that we have known nothing about your very existence all the time! This is my daughter—my only daughter, Philippa.’ Then she subsided into her chair, leaving Philippa to do the rest. ‘We are cousins,’ said Philippa, kindly but with cold and curious eyes. ‘I hope we shall be friends.’ Then she turned to the companion. ‘Oh!’ she cried, with a start of surprise. ‘It is Zoe!’

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Elstree, a quick smile on her lips. ‘Formerly it was Zoe. How do you do, Philippa?’ Her voice was naturally soft and sweet, a caressing voice, a voice of

velvet. She glanced at Philippa as she spoke, and her eyes flashed with a light which hardly corresponded with the voice. 'I was wondering, as we came here, whether you would remember me. It is so long since we were at school together. How long, dear? Seven years? Eight years? You remember that summer at the seaside—where was it? One changes a good deal in seven years. Yet I thought, somehow, that you would remember me. You are looking very well, Philippa—still.'

A doubtful compliment, but conveyed in the softest manner, which should have removed any possible doubt. Armored looked on with some astonishment. On Philippa's face there had risen a flaming spot. Something was going on below the surface. But Philippa laughed.

'Of course, I remember you very well,' she said.

'But, dear Philippa,' Mrs. Elstree went on, softly smiling and gently speaking, 'I am no longer Zoe. I am Mrs. Jerome Elstree

—I am La Veuve Elstree. I am Armorel's companion.'

'I am sorry,' Philippa replied coldly. Her eyes belied her words. She was not sorry. She did not care whether good or evil had happened to this woman. She was too good a Christian to desire the latter, and not good enough to wish the former. What she had really hoped—whenever she thought of Zoe—was that she might never, never meet her again. And here she was, a guest in her own home, and companion to her own cousin!

Then Mr. Rosevean appeared, and welcomed the new cousin cordially. He seemed a cheerful, good-tempered kind of man, was sixty years of age, bald on the forehead, and of aspect like the conventional Colonel of *Punch*—in fact, he had been in the Army, and served through the Crimean war, which was quite enough for honour. He passed his time laboriously considering his investments—for he had great possessions—and making small collections which never came to anything.

He also wrote letters to the papers, but these seldom appeared.

Then they went in to dinner. The conversation naturally turned at first upon Scilly, their common starting-point, and the illustrious family of the Roseveans.

‘As soon as I heard about you, my dear young lady, I set to work to discover our exact relationship. My grandfather, Sir Jacob—you have heard of Sir Jacob Rosevean, Knight of Hanover? Yes; naturally—he was born in the year 1760. He was the younger brother of Captain Emanuel Rosevean, your great-grandfather, I believe.’

‘My grandfathers were all named either Emanuel or Methusalem. They took turns.’

‘Quite so.’ Mr. Rosevean nodded his head in approbation. ‘The preservation of the same Christian names gives dignity to the family. Anthony goes with Ashley: Emanuel or Methusalem with Rosevean. The survival of the Scripture name shows how the Puritanic spirit lingers yet in the good old stocks.’ Philippa glanced at her mother, mindful of

her own remarks on the old families of Scilly. 'We come of a very fine old family, Cousin Armorel. I hope you have been brought up in becoming pride of birth. It is a possession which the world cannot give and the world cannot take away. We are a race of Vikings—conquering Vikings. The last of them was, perhaps, my grandfather, Sir Jacob, unless any of the later Roseveans——'

'I am afraid they can hardly be called Vikings,' said Armorel, simply.

'Sir Jacob—my grandfather—was cast, my dear young friend, in the heroic mould—the heroic mould. Nothing short of that. For the services which he rendered to the State at the moment of Britannia's greatest peril, he should have been raised to the House of Lords. But it was a time of giants—and he had to be contented with the simple recognition of a knighthood.'

'Jacob Rosevean'—who was it had told Armorel this—long before? And why did she now remember the words so clearly, 'ran away and went to sea. He could read and

write and cipher a little, and so they made him clerk to the purser. Then he rose to be purser himself, and when he had made some money he left the service and became Contractor to the Fleet, and supplied stores of all kinds during the long war, and at last he became so rich that they were obliged to make him a Knight.'

'The simple recognition of a Knighthood,' Mr. Rosevean went on. 'This it is to live in an age of heroes.'

Armored waited for further details. Later on, perhaps, some of the heroic achievements of the great Sir Jacob would be related. Meantime, every hero must make a beginning: why should not Jacob Rosevean begin as purser's clerk? It was pleasing to the girl to observe how large and generous a view her cousins took of the family greatness—never before had she known to what an illustrious stock she belonged. The smuggling, the wrecking, the piloting, the farming—these were all forgotten. A whole race of heroic ancestors had taken the place of the



plain Roseveans whom Armorel knew. Well, if by the third generation of wealth and position one cannot evolve so simple a thing as an ancient family, what is the use of history, genealogy, heraldry, and imagination? The Roseveans were Vikings: they were the terror of the French coast: they went a-crusading with short legged Robert: they were rovers of the Spanish Main: the great King of Spain trembled when he heard their name: they were buccaneers. Portraits of some of these ancestors hung on the wall: Sir Jacob himself, of course, was there; and Sir Jacob's great-grandfather, a Cavalier; and his grandfather, an Elizabethan worthy. Presumably, these portraits came from Samson Island. But Armorel had never heard of any family portraits, and she had grown up in shameful ignorance of these heroes. There was a coat-of-arms, too, with which she was not acquainted. Yet there were circumstances connected with the grant of that shield by the Sovereign—King Edward I.—which were highly creditable to the family. Armorel

listened and marvelled. But her host evidently believed it all: and, indeed, it was his father, not himself, who had imagined these historic splendours.

‘It is pleasing,’ he said, ‘to revive these memories between members of different branches. You, however, are fresh from the ancestral scenes. You are the heiress of the ancient island home: yours is the Hall of the Vikings: to you have been entrusted the relics of the past. I look upon you and seem to see again the Rovers putting forth to drag down the Spanish pride. There are noble memories, Armorel—I must call you Armorel—associated with that isle of Samson, our ancient family domain. Let us never forget them.’

The dinner came to an end at last, and the ladies went away.

Mrs. Elstree sat down in the most comfortable chair by the fire and was silent, leaning her face upon her hands and looking into the firelight. Mrs. Rosevean took a chair on

the other side and fell asleep. Philippa and Armorel talked.

‘I cannot understand,’ said Philippa, bluntly, ‘how such a girl as you could have come from Scilly. I have been reading a book about the place, and it says that the people are all poor, and that Samson, your island—our island—is quite a small place.’

‘I will tell you if you like,’ said Armorel, ‘as much about myself as you please to hear.’ The chief advantage of an autobiography—as you shall see, dear reader, if you will oblige me by reading mine, when it comes out—is the right of preserving silence upon certain points. Armorel, for example, said nothing at all about Roland Lee. Nor did she tell of the chagreen case with the rubies. But she did tell how she found the treasure of the sea-chest, and the cupboard, and how she took everything, except the punch-bowls and the silver ship and cups, to London, and how she gave them over to the lawyer to whom she had a letter. And she told how she was resolved to repair the deficiencies of her up-

bringing, and how, for five long years, she had worked day and night.

‘I think you are a very brave girl,’ said Philippa. ‘Most girls in your place would have been contented to sit down and enjoy their good fortune.’

‘I was so very ignorant when I began. And—and one or two things had happened which made me ashamed of my ignorance.’

‘Yet it was brave of you to work so hard.’

‘At first,’ said Armored, ‘when this good fortune came to me I was afraid, thinking of the Parable of the Rich Man.’ Philippa started and looked astonished. In the circle of Dives this Parable is never mentioned. No one regardeth that Parable, which is generally believed to be a late interpolation. ‘But when I came to think, I understood that it might be the gift of the Five Talents—a sacred trust.’

Philippa’s eyes showed no comprehension of this language. Armored, indeed, had learned long since that the Bryanite or Early

Christian language is no longer used in society. But Philippa was her cousin. Perhaps, in the family, it would still pass current.

‘I worked most at music. Shall I play to you?’

‘Nothing, dear Philippa,’ said Zoe, half-turning round, ‘would please you so much as to hear Armorel play. You used to play a little yourself’—Philippa had been the pride and glory of the school for her playing—‘A little!’ Had she lost her memory?

‘Will you play this evening?’

‘I brought her violin in the carriage,’ said Zoe, softly. ‘I wanted to give you as many delightful surprises as possible, Philippa. To find your cousin so beautiful: to hear her play: and to receive me again! This will be, indeed, an evening to remember.’

‘I will play if you like,’ said Armorel, simply. ‘But perhaps you have made other arrangements.’

‘No—no—you can play? But of course, you have had good masters. You shall play instead of me.’

Zoe murmured her satisfaction, and turned again her face to the fire.

‘Tell me, Armored,’ said Philippa, ‘all this about the Vikings—the Hall of the Vikings—the Rovers—and the rest of it. Was it familiar to you?’

‘No; I have never heard of any Vikings or Rovers. And there is no Hall.’

‘We are, I suppose, really an old family of Scilly?’

‘We have lived in the same place for I know not how many years. One of the outlying rocks of Scilly is called Rosevean. Oh! there is no doubt about our antiquity. About the Crusaders, and all the rest of it, I know nothing. Perhaps because there was nobody to tell me.’

‘I see,’ said Philippa, thoughtfully. ‘Well, it does no harm to believe these things. Perhaps some of them are true. Sir Jacob, certainly, cannot be denied; nor the Roseveans of Samson Island. My dear, I am very glad you came.’

## CHAPTER II

## THE SONATA

THE room was full of people. It was the average sort of reception, where one always expects to meet men and women who have done something: men who write, paint, or compose; women who do the same, but not so well; women who play and sing; women who are æsthetic, and show their appreciation of art by wearing hideous dresses; women who recite: men and women who advocate all kinds of things—mostly cranks and cracks. There are, besides, the people who know the people who do things: and these, who are a talkative and appreciative folk, carry on the conversation. Thirdly, there are the people who do nothing, and know nobody, who go away and talk casually of having met this or that great man last night.



‘Armored,’ said Philippa, ‘let me introduce Dr. Bovey-Tracy. Perhaps you already know his works.’

‘Unfortunately—not yet,’ Armored replied.

The Doctor was quite a young man, not more than two- or three-and-twenty. His degree was German, and his appearance, with long light hair and spectacles, was studiously German. If he could have Germanised his name as well as his appearance he would certainly have done so. As a pianist, a teacher of music, and a composer, the young Doctor is already beginning to be known. When Armored confessed her ignorance, he gently spread his hands and smiled pity. ‘If you will really play, Armored, Dr. Bovey-Tracy will kindly accompany you.’

Armored took her violin out of the case and began to tune it.

‘What will you play?’ asked the musician: ‘something serious? So?’

Armored turned over a pile of music and selected a piece. It was the sonata by Schu-

mann in D minor for violin and pianoforte. 'Shall we play this?'

Philippa looked a little surprised. The choice was daring. The Herr Doctor smiled graciously: 'This is, indeed, serious,' he said.

I suppose that to begin your musical training with the performance of heys and hornpipes and country dances is not the modern scientific method. But he who learns to fiddle for sailors to dance may acquire a mastery over the instrument which the modern scientific method teaches much more slowly. Armorel began her musical training with a fiddle as obedient to her as the Slave of the Lamp to his master. And for five years she had been under masters playing every day, until——

The pianist sat down, held his outstretched fingers professionally over the keys, and struck a chord. Armorel raised her bow, and the sonata began.

I am told that there is now quite a fair percentage of educated people who really do understand music, can tell good playing from

bad, and fine playing from its counterfeit. In the same way, there is a percentage—but not nearly so large—of people who know a good picture when they see it, and can appreciate correct drawing if they cannot understand fine colour. Out of the sixty or seventy people who filled this room, there were certainly twenty—but then it was an exceptionally good collection—who understood that a violinist born and trained was playing to them, in a style not often found outside St. James's Hall. And they marvelled while the music delivered its message—which is different for every soul. They sat or stood in silence, spellbound. Of the remaining fifty, thirty understood that a piece of classical music was going on: it had no voice or message for them: they did not comprehend one single phrase—the sonata might have been a sermon in the Bulgarian tongue: but they knew how to behave in the presence of Music, and they governed themselves accordingly. The Remnant—twenty in number—containing all the young men and most of the girls, understood

that here was a really beautiful girl playing the fiddle for them. The young men murmured their admiration, and the girls whispered envious things—not necessarily spiteful, but certainly envious. What girl could resist envy at sight of that dress, with its lace, and that command of the violin, and—which every girl concedes last of all, and grudgingly—that face and figure?

Philippa stood beside the piano, rather pale. She knew, now, why her old school-fellow had been so anxious that Armorel should play. Kind and thoughtful Zoe!

The playing of the first movement surprised her. Here was one who had, indeed, mastered her instrument. At the playing of the second, which is a scherzo, bright and lively, she acknowledged her mistress—not her rival. At the playing of the third, which contains a lovely, simple, innocent, and happy tune, her heart melted—never, never, could she so pour into her playing the soul of that melody: never could she so rise to the spirit of the musician and put into the music what

even he himself had not imagined. But Zoe was wrong. Her soul was not filled with envy. Philippa had a larger soul.

It was finished. The twenty who understood gasped. The thirty who listened murmured thanks, and resumed their talk about something else. The twenty who neither listened nor understood went on talking without any comment at all.

‘You have had excellent masters,’ said the Doctor. ‘You play very well indeed—not like an amateur. It is a pity that you cannot play in public.’

‘You have made good use of your opportunities,’ said Philippa. ‘I have never heard an amateur play better. I play a little myself; but——’

‘I said you would be pleased,’ Zoe murmured softly at her side. ‘I knew you would be pleased when you heard Armorel play.’

‘You will play yourself, presently?’ said the Herr Doctor.

‘No; not this evening,’ Philippa replied. ‘Impossible—after Armorel.’

‘Not this evening!’ echoed Zoe, sweetly.

Then there came walking tall and erect through the crowd, which respectfully parted right and left to let him pass, a young man of striking and even distinguished appearance.

‘Philippa,’ he said, ‘will you introduce me to your cousin?’

‘Armored, this is another cousin of mine — unfortunately not of yours — Mr. Alec Feilding.’

‘I am very unfortunate, Miss Rosevean. I came too late to hear more than the end of the sonata. Normann-Néruda herself could not interpret that music better.’ Then he saw Zoe, and greeted her as an old friend. ‘Mrs. Elstree and I,’ he said, ‘have known each other a long time.’

‘Fifty years, at least,’ Zoe murmured. ‘Is it not so long, Philippa?’

‘Will you play something else?’ he asked. ‘The people are dying to hear you again.’

Armored looked at Philippa. ‘If you will,’ she said kindly. ‘If you are not tired. Play

us, this time, something lighter. We cannot all appreciate Schumann.'

'Shall I give you a memory of Scilly?' she replied. 'That will be light enough.'

She played, in fact, that old ditty—one of those which she had been wont to play for the Ancient Lady—called 'Prince Rupert's March.' She played this with variations which that gallant Cavalier had never heard. It is a fine air, however, and lends itself to the phantasy of a musician. Then those who had understood the sonata laughed with condescension, as a philosopher laughs when he hears a simple story; and those who had pretended to understand pricked up their ears, thinking that this was another piece of classical music, and joyfully perceiving that they would understand it; and those who had made no pretence now listened with open mouths and ears as upright as those of any wild-ass of the desert. Music worth hearing, this. Armored played for five or six minutes. Then she stopped and laid down her violin.



‘I think I have played enough for one evening,’ she said.

She left the piano and retired into the throng. A girl took her place. The Herr Doctor placed another piece of music before him, lifted his hands, held them suspended for a moment, and then struck a chord. This girl began to sing.

Mr. Alec Feilding followed Armorel and led her to a seat at the end of the room. Then he sat down beside her and, as soon as the song was finished, began to talk.

He began by talking about music, and the Masters in music. His talk was authoritative: he laid down opinions: he talked as if he was writing a book of instruction: and he talked as if the whole wide world was listening to him. But not quite so loudly as if that had been really the case.

He was a man of thirty or so, his features were perfectly regular, but his expression was rather wooden. His eyes were good, but rather too close together. His mouth was

hidden by a huge moustache, curled and twisted and pointed forwards.

Armored disliked his manner, and for some reason or other distrusted his face.

He left off laying down the law on music, and began to talk about things personal.

‘I hope you like your new companion,’ he said. ‘She is an old friend of mine. I was in hopes of being able to advance her husband in his profession; but he died before I got the chance. Mr. Jagenal told me what was wanted, and I was happy in recommending Zoe—Mrs. Elstree.’

‘Thank you,’ said Armored, coldly. ‘I dare say we shall get to like each other in time.’

‘If so, I shall rejoice in having been of some service to you as well as to her. What is her day at home?’

‘I believe we are to be at home on Wednesdays.’

‘As for me,’ he said lightly, ‘I am always at home in my studio. I am a triple slave, Miss Rosevean, as you may have heard. I

am a slave of the brush, the pen, and the wastepaper-basket. If you will come with Mrs. Elstree to my studio I can show you one or two things that you might like to see.'

'Thank you,' she replied, without apparent interest in his studio. The young man was not accustomed to girls who showed no interest in him, and retired, chilled. Presently she heard his voice again. This time he was talking with Philippa. They were talking low in the doorway beside her, but she could not choose but hear.

'You recommended her—you?' said Philippa.

'Why not?'

'Do you know how—where—she has been living for the last seven years?'

'Certainly. She married an American. He died a year ago, leaving her rather badly off. Is there any reason, Philippa, why I should not recommend her? If there is I will speak to Mr. Jagenal.'

'No—no—no. There is no reason that I

know of. Somebody told me she had gone on the stage. Who was it?’

‘Gone on the stage? No—no; she was married to this American.’

‘You have never spoken to me about her.’

‘Reason enough, fair cousin. You do not like her.’

‘And—you—do,’ she replied slowly.

‘I like all pretty women, Philippa. I respect one only.’

Then other people came and were introduced to Armored. One does not leave in cold neglect a girl who is so beautiful and plays so wonderfully. None of them interested Armored very much. At the beginning, when a girl first goes into society, she expects to be interested and excited at a general gathering. This expectation disappears, and the current coin of everybody’s talk takes the place of interest.

Suddenly she caught a face which she knew. When a girl has been travelling about for five years she sees a great many

faces. This was a face which she remembered perfectly well, yet could not at first place it in any scene or assign it to any date. Then she recollected. And she walked boldly across the room and stood before the owner of that face.

‘ You have forgotten me,’ she said abruptly.

‘ I—I—can I ever have known you?’ he asked.

‘ Will you shake hands, Mr. Stephenson? You were Dick Stephenson five years ago. Have you forgotten Armored, of Samson Island in Scilly?’

No. He had not forgotten that young lady. But he would never have known her thus changed—thus dressed.

‘ Where is your friend Roland Lee?’

Dick Stephenson changed colour. ‘ I have not seen him for a long time. We are no longer—exactly—friends.’

‘ Why not?’ she asked, with severity. ‘ Have you done anything bad? How have you offended him?’

‘ No, no; certainly not.’ He coloured

more deeply. 'I have done nothing bad at all,' he added, with much indignation.

'Have you deserted him, then? I thought men never gave up their friends. Come to see me. Mr. Stephenson. You shall tell me where he is and what he is doing.'

In the press of the crowd, as they were going away, she heard Mr. Jagenal's voice.

'You are burning the candle at both ends, Alec,' he was saying. 'You cannot possibly go on painting, writing, editing your paper, riding in the Park, and going out every evening as you do now. No man's constitution can stand it, young gentleman. Curb your activity. Be wise in time.'

## CHAPTER III

## THE CLEVEREST MAN IN LONDON

ALEC FEILDING—everybody, even those who had never seen him, called him Alec—stood before the fire in his own den. In his hand he held a manuscript, which he was reading with great care, making dabs and dashes on it with a thick red pencil.

Sometimes he called the place his studio, sometimes his study. No other man in London, I believe, has so good a right to call his workshop by either name. No other man in London, certainly, is so well known both for pen and pencil. To be at once a poet, a novelist, an essayist, and a painter, and to do all these things well, if not splendidly, is given to few.

The room was large and lofty, as becomes a studio. A heavy curtain hung across the



door: the carpet was thick: there was a great fireplace, as deep and broad as that of an old hall, the fire burning on bricks in the ancient style. Above the fireplace there was no modern overmantel, but dark panels of oak, carved in flowers and grapes, with a coat of arms—his own: he claimed descent from the noble House of Feilding: and in the centre panel his own portrait let into the wall without a frame—the work was executed by the most illustrious portrait-painter of the day—the face full of thought, the eyes charged with feeling, the features clear, regular, and classical. A beautiful portrait, with every point idealised. Three sides of the room were fitted with bookshelves, as becomes a study, and these were filled with books. The fourth side was partly hung with tapestry and partly adorned with armour and weapons. Here were also two small pictures, representing the illustrious Alec in childhood—the light of future genius already in his eyes—and in early manhood.

A large library table, littered with books,

manuscripts, and proofs, belonged to the study. An easel before the north light, and another table provided with palettes, brushes, paints, and all the tools of the limning trade, belonged to the studio.

The house, which was in St. John's Wood, stood in an old garden at the end of a cul-de-sac off the main road: it was, therefore, quiet: the house itself was new, built in the style now familiar, and put up for the convenience of those who believe that there is nothing in the world to be considered except Art. Therefore there was a spacious hall: stairs broad enough for an ancient mansion led to the first floor and to the great studio. There were also three or four small cupboards, called bed-rooms, dining-room, and anything else you might please. But the studio was the real thing. The house was built for the studio.

The place was charged with an atmosphere of peace. Intellectual calm reigned here. Art of all kinds abhors noise. One could feel here the silence necessary for in-

tellectual efforts of the highest order. Apart from the books and the easel and this silence, the character of the occupant was betrayed—or perhaps proclaimed—by other things. The furniture was massive: the library table of the largest kind: the easy chairs by the fire as solid and comfortable as if they had been designed for a club smoking-room: a cabinet showed a collection of china behind glass: the appointments, down to the inkstand and the paper-knife, were large and solid: all together spoke not only of the artist but of the successful artist: not only of the man who works, but of one who works with success and honour: the man arrived. The things also spoke of the splendid man, the man who knows that success should be followed by the splendid life. Too often the successful man is a poor-spirited creature, who continues in the humble middle-class style to which he was born; is satisfied with his suburban villa, never wants a better house or one more finely appointed, and has no craving for society. What is success worth

if one does not live up to it? Success is not an end: it is the means: it brings the power of getting the things that make life—wine—horses—the best cook at the best club—sport—the society, every day, of beautiful and well-bred women—all these things the man who has succeeded can enjoy. Those who have not yet succeeded may envy the favourite of Fortune.

As for his work, this highly successful man owned that he could not desert the Muse of Painting any more than her sister of Belles-Lettres. Happy would he be with either, were t' other dear charmer away! Happier still was he with both! And they were not jealous. They allowed him—these tender creatures—to love them both. He was by nature polygamous, perhaps.

Therefore those who were invited to see his latest picture—the lucky few, because you must not think that his studio was open on Show Sunday for all the world to see—stayed, when they had admired that production, to talk of his latest poem or his latest story.

Over the mantelshelf was quite a stack of invitations. And really one hardly knows whether Alec Feilding was most to be envied for his success as a painter—though he painted little: or for his stories—though these were all short—much too short: or for his verses—certainly written in the most delightful vein of *vers de société*: or for his essays, full of observation: or for his social success, which was undoubted. And there is no doubt that there was not any man in London more envied, or who occupied a more enviable position, than Alec Feilding. To be sure, he deserved it: because, without any exception, he was the cleverest man in town.

He owned and edited a paper of his own—a weekly journal devoted to the higher interests of Art. It was called *The Muses Nine*. It was illustrated especially by blocks from art books noticed in its columns. In this paper his own things first appeared: his verses, his stories, his essays. The columns signed *Editor* were the leading feature of the

paper, for which alone many people bought it every week. The contents of these columns were always fresh, epigrammatic, and delightful: in the stories a certain feminine quality lent piquancy—it seemed sometimes as if a man could not have written these stories; the verses always tripped lightly, merrily, and gracefully along. An Abbé de la Cour in the last century might have served up such a weekly dish for the Parisians, had he been the cleverest man in Paris.

Alec Feilding's enemies—every man who is rising or has risen has enemies—consoled themselves for a success which could not be denied by sneering at the ephemeral character of his work. It was for to-day: to-morrow, they said, it would be flat. This was not quite true, but, as it is equally true of nearly every piece of modern work, the successful author could afford to disregard this criticism. Perhaps there may be, here and there, a writer who expects more than a limited immortality: I do not know any, but there may be some. And these will probably be dis-

appointed. The enemies said further that his social success—also undoubted—was due to his unbounded cheek. This, too, was partly true, because, if one would rise at all, one must possess that useful quality: without it one will surely sink. It is not to be denied that this young man walked into drawing-rooms as if his presence was a favour: that he spoke as one who delivers a judgment: and that he professed a profound belief in himself. With such gifts and graces—the gift of painting, the gift of verse, the gift of fiction, a handsome presence, good manners, and unbounded cheek—Alec Feilding had already risen very high indeed for so young a man. His enemies, again, said that he was looking out for an heiress.

His enemies, as sometimes but not often happens, spoke from imperfect knowledge. Every man has his weak points, and should be careful to keep them to himself—friends may become enemies—and to let no one know them or suspect them. As for the weak points of Alec Feilding—had his

enemies known them—— But you shall see.

He sat down at his library-table and began to copy the manuscript that he had been reading. It was a laborious task, first because copying work is always tedious, and next because he was making alterations—changing names and places—and leaving out bits. He worked on steadily for about half an hour.

Then there was a gentle tap at the door, and his servant—who looked as solemn and discreet as if he had been Charles the Second's confidential clerk of the Back-stairs—came in noiselessly on tiptoe and whispered a name. Alec placed the manuscript and his copy carefully in a drawer, and nodded his head.

You have already seen the man who came in. Five years older, and a good deal altered—changed, perhaps, for the worse—but then the freshness of twenty-one cannot be expected to last. The man who stayed three weeks in Samson, and promised a girl that he



would return. The man who broke that promise, and forgot the girl. He never went back to Scilly. Perhaps he had grown handsomer: his Vandyke beard and moustache were by this time thicker and longer: he was more picturesque in appearance than of old: he still wore a brown velvet coat: he looked still more what he was—an artist. But his cheek was thin and pale, dark rings were round his eyes, his face was gloomy: he wore the look of waste—the waste of energy and of purpose. It is not good to see this look in the eyes of a young man.

‘You sent for me,’ he said, with no other greeting.

‘I did. Come in. Is the door shut? I’ve got some good news for you. Heavens! you look as if you wanted good news badly! What’s the matter, man? More debts and duns? And I want to consult you a little about this picture of yours’—he pointed to the easel.

‘Mine? No: yours. You have bought me—pictures and all.’

‘Just as you like. What does it matter —here—within these walls?’

‘Hush! Even here you should not whisper it. The birds of the air, you know —— Take great care——’ Roland laughed, but not mirthfully. ‘Mine?’ he repeated; ‘mine? Suppose I were to call together the fellows at the club, and suppose I were to tell the story of the last three years?—eh? eh? How a man was fooled on until he sold himself and became a slave—eh?’

‘You can’t tell that story, Roland, you know.’

‘Some day I will—I must.’

Alec Feilding threw himself back in his chair, crossed his legs, and joined his fingers. It is an attitude of judicial remonstrance.

‘Come, Roland,’ he said, smiling blandly. ‘Let us have it out. It galls sometimes, doesn’t it? But remember you can’t have everything—come, now. If you were to tell the fellows at the club, truthfully, the whole story, they would, I dare say, be glad to get such a beautiful pile of stones to throw at

me. One more reputation built on pretence and humbug—eh? Yes: the little edifice which you and I have reared together with so much care would be shattered at a single stroke. wouldn't it? You could do that: you can always do that. But at some little cost to yourself—some little cost, remember.'

Roland remarked that the cost or consequences of that little exploit might be condemned.

· Truly. If you will. But not until you realise what they are. Now my version of the story is this. There was once—three years ago—a fellow who had failed. The Academy wouldn't accept his pictures; no one would buy them. And yet he had some power and true feeling. But he could not succeed: he could not get anybody to buy his pictures. And then he was an extravagant kind of man: he was head over ears in debt: he liked to lead the easy life—dinner and billiards at the club—all the rest of it. Then there was another man—an old schoolfellow of his—a man who wanted, for

purposes of his own, a reputation for genius in more than one branch of Art. He wanted to seem a master of painting as well as poetry and fiction. This man addressed the Failure. He said, "Unsuccessful Greatness, I will buy your pictures of you, on the simple condition that I may call them mine." The Failure hesitated at first. Naturally. He was loth to write himself down a Failure. Everybody would be. Then he consented. He promised to paint no more in the style in which he had failed except for this other man. Then the other man, who knew his way about, called his friends together, set up a picture painted by the Failure on an easel, bought the tools, laid them out on the table—there they are—and launched himself upon the world as an artist as well as a poet and author. A Fraud, wasn't he? Yet it paid both men—the Fraud and the Failure. For the Fraud knew how to puff the work, and to get it puffed and praised and noticed everywhere; he made people talk about it: he had paragraphs about it: he got critics to

treat his—or the Failure's—pictures seriously: in fact, he advertised them as successfully and as systematically as if he had been a soap-man. Is this true, so far?'

'Quite true. Go on—Fraud.'

'I will—Failure. Then the price of the pictures went up. The Fraud was able to sell them at a price continually rising. And the Failure received a price in proportion. He shared in the proceeds. The Fraud gave him two thirds. Is that true? Two thirds. He ran your price, Failure, from nothing at all to four hundred and fifty pounds—your last, and biggest price. And he gave you two thirds. All you had to do was to produce the pictures. What he did was to persuade the world that they were great and valuable pictures. Is that true?'

Roland grunted.

'Three years ago you were at your wits' end for the next day's dinner. You had borrowed of all your friends: you had pawned your watch and chain: you were face to face with poverty—no; starvation. Deny that,

if you can.' He turned fiercely on Roland. 'You can't deny it. What are you now? You have a good income: you dine every day on the best of everything: you do yourself well in every respect. Hang it, Roland, you are an ungrateful dog!'

'You have ruined my life. You have robbed me of my name.'

'Let us stop heroics. If you are useful to me, I am ten times as useful to you. Because, my dear boy, without me you cannot live. Without you I can do very well. Indeed, I have only to find another starving genius—there are plenty about—in order to keep up my reputation as a painter. Go to the club. Call the men together. Tell them if you like, and what you like. You have no proofs. I can deny it, and I can give you the sack, and I can get that other starving genius to carry on the work.'

Roland made no reply.

'Why, my dear fellow—why should we quarrel? What does it matter about a little reputation? What is the good of your

precious name to you when you are dead? Here you are—painting better and better every day—your price rising—your position more assured—what on earth can any man want more? As for me, you are useful to me. If you were not, I should put an end to the arrangement. That is understood. Very well, then. Enough said. Now, if you please, we will look at the picture.'

He got up and walked across the room to the easel. Roland followed submissively, with hanging head. He staggered as he went: not with strong drink, but with the rage that tore his heart.

'It is really a very beautiful thing,' said the cleverest man in all London, looking at it critically. 'I think that even you have never done anything quite so good.'

The picture showed a great rock rising precipitous from the sea—at its base was a reef or projecting shelf. The shags stood in a line on the top of the rock: the sea-gulls flew around the rock and sailed merrily before the breeze: there was a little sea on, but not

much : a boat with a young man in it lay off the rock, and a girl was on the reef standing among the long yellow seaweed : the spray flew up the sides of the rock : the sun was sinking. What was it but one of Roland's sketches made in the Outer Islands, with Armorel for his companion ?

‘It is very good, Roland,’ Alec repeated. ‘If I am not so good a painter myself, I am not envious. I can appreciate and acknowledge good work.’ Under the circumstances, rather an extraordinary speech. But Roland's gloomy face softened a little. Even at such a moment the artist feels the power of praise. The other, standing before the picture, watched the softening of the face. ‘Good work?’ he repeated by way of question. ‘Man ! it is splendid work ! I can feel the breath of the salt breeze : I can see the white spray flying over the rock : the girl stands out real and living. It is a splendid piece of work, Roland.’

‘I think it is better than the last,’ the unlucky painter replied huskily.



‘I should rather think it is. I expect to get a great name for this picture’—the painter winced—‘and you—you—the painter, will get a much more solid thing—you will get a big cheque. I’ve sold it already. No dealers this time. It has been bought by a rich American. Three hundred is the figure I can offer you. And here’s your cheque.’

He took it, ready drawn and signed, from his pocket-book. Roland Lee received it, but he let it drop from his fingers: the paper fluttered to the floor. He gazed upon the picture in silence.

‘Well? What are you thinking of?’

‘I was thinking of the day when I made the sketch for that picture. I remember what the girl said to me.’

‘What the devil does it matter what the girl said? All we care about is the picture.’

‘I remember her very words. You who have bought the picture can see the girl; but I, who painted it, can hear her voice.’

‘You are not going off into heroics again?’

‘No, no. Don’t be afraid. I am not going to tell you what she said. Only I told her, being pleased with what she told me, that she was a prophetess. Nobody ought ever to prophesy good things about a man, for they never come to pass. Let them prophesy disappointment and ruin and shame, and then they always come true. My God! what a prophecy was hers! And what has come of it? I have sold my genius, which is my soul. I have traded it away. It is the sin unforgiven in this world and in the next.’

‘When you give over tragedy and blank verse——’

‘Oh! I have done.’

‘I should like to ask you a question.’

‘Ask it.’

‘The foreground—the seaweeds lying over the boulders. Does the light fall quite naturally? I hardly understand—look here. If the sunlight——’

‘*You* to pretend to be a painter!’ Roland snorted impatiently. ‘*You* to talk about

lights and shadows! Man alive! I wonder you haven't been found out ages ago! The light falls this way—this way—see!—he turned the painting about to show how it fell.

‘Oh! I understand. Yes, yes; I see now.’ Alec seemed not to resent this language of contempt.

‘Is there anything else you want to know before I go? Perhaps you wish the sea painted black?’

‘Cornish coast again, I suppose?’

‘Somewhere that way. What does it matter where you put it? Call it a view on Primrose Hill.’

He stooped and picked up the cheque. He looked at it savagely for a moment as if he would like to tear it into a thousand fragments. Then he crammed it into his pocket and turned to go.

‘My American,’ said Alec, ‘who rolls in money, is ready to buy another. I think I can make an advance of fifty. Shall we say three hundred and fifty? And shall we

expect the painting in three months or so? Before the summer holidays—say. You will become rich, old man. As for this fellow, he is going to the New Gallery. Go and gaze upon it, and say to yourself, “This was worth, to me, three hundred—three hundred.” How many men at the club, Roland, can command three hundred for a picture? Thirty is nearer their figure; and your own, dear boy, would have continued to stand at double duck’s egg if it had not been for me. Trust me for running up your price. Our interests, my dear Roland, are identical and indivisible. I think you are the only painter in history whose name will remain unknown though his works will live as long as the pigments keep their colour. Fortune is yours, and fame is mine. You have got the best of the bargain.’

‘Curse you and your bargain!’

‘Pleasant words, Roland’—his face darkened. ‘Pleasant words, if you please, or perhaps. . . . I know, now, what is the reason of this outbreak. I heard last night

a rumour. You've been taking opium again.'

'It isn't true. If it was, what does that matter to you?'

'This, my friend. The partnership exists only so long as the work continues to improve. If bad habits spoil the quality of the work I shall dissolve the partnership, and find that other starving genius—plenty, plenty, plenty about. Nothing shakes the nerves more quickly than opium. Nothing destroys the finer powers of head and hand more surely. Don't let me hear any more about opium. Don't fall into bad habits if you want to go on making an income. And don't let me have to speak of this again. Now, there is no more to be said, I think. Well, we part friends. Ta-ta, dear boy.'

Roland flung himself out of the room with an interjection of great strength not found in the school grammars.

Alec Feilding returned to his table. 'Roland's a great fool,' he murmured. 'Because there isn't a gallery in London that

wouldn't jump at his pictures, and he could sell as fast as he could paint. A great fool he is. But it would be very difficult for me to find another man so good and such a fool. On fools and their folly the wise man flourishes.'

## CHAPTER IV

## MASTER OF ALL THE ARTS



THIS unreasonable person dispatched, and the illustrious artist's doubts about his lights and shadows dispelled, Alec Feilding resumed his interrupted task. That is to say, he took the manuscript out of the drawer and went on laboriously copying it. So great a writer, whose time was so precious, might surely give out his copying work. Lesser men do this. For half an hour he worked on. Then the servant tapped at the door and came in again, noiselessly as before, to whisper a name.

Alec nodded, and once more put back the manuscript in the drawer.

The visitor was a young lady. She was of slight and slender figure, dressed quite

plainly, and even poorly, in a cloth jacket and a stuff frock. Her gloves were shabby. Her features were fine but not beautiful, the eyes bright, and the mouth mobile, but the forehead too large for beauty. She carried a black leather roll such as those who teach music generally carry about with them. She was quite young, certainly not more than two-and-twenty.

‘Effie?’ He looked round, surprised.

‘May I come in for two minutes? I will not stay longer. Indeed, I should be so sorry to waste your time.’

‘I am sure you would, Effie.’ He gave her his hand, without rising. ‘Precious time—my time—there is so little of it. Therefore, child——’

‘I have brought you,’ she said, ‘another little poem. I think it is the kind of thing you like—in the *vers de société* style.’ She unrolled her leather case and took out a very neatly written paper.

He read it slowly. Then he nodded his head approvingly and read it aloud.



‘How long does it take you to knock off this kind of thing, Effie?’

‘It took me the whole of yesterday. This morning I corrected it and copied it out. Do you like it?’

‘You are a clever little animal, Effie, and you shall make your fortune. Yes; it is very good, very good indeed: Austin Dobson himself is not better. It is very good: light, tripping, graceful—in good taste. It is very good indeed. Leave it with me, Effie. If I like it as well to-morrow as I do to-day, you may depend upon seeing it in the next number.’

‘Oh!’ she blushed a rosy red with the pleasure of being praised. Indeed, it is a pleasure which never palls. The old man who has been praised all his life is just as eager for more as the young poet who is only just beginning. ‘Oh! you really think it is good?’

‘I do indeed. The best proof is that I am going to buy it of you. It shall go into the editor’s column—my own column—in the place of honour.’

‘Yes,’ she replied, but doubtfully—and she reddened again for a different reason. ‘Oh, Mr. Feilding,’ she said with an effort, ‘I am so happy when I see my verses in print—in your paper—even without my name. It makes me so proud that I hardly dare to say what I want.’

‘Say it, Effie. Get it off your mind. You will feel better afterwards.’

‘Well, then, it cannot be anything to you—so great and high, with your beautiful stories and your splendid pictures. What is a poor little set of verses to you?’

‘Go on—go on.’ His face clouded and his eyes hardened.

‘In the paper it doesn’t matter a bit. It is—it is—later—when they come out all together in a little volume—with—with——’

‘Go on, I say.’ He sat upright, his chair half turned, his hands on the arms, his face severe and judicial.

‘With your name on the title-page.’

‘Oh! that is troubling your mind, is it?’

‘When the critics praise the poems and

praise the poet—oh! is it right, Mr. Feilding? Is it right?’

‘Upon my word!’ He pushed back his chair and rose, a tall man of six feet, frowning angrily—so that the girl trembled and tottered. ‘Upon my word! This—from you! This from the girl whom I have literally kept from starvation! Miss Effie Wilmot, perhaps you will tell me what you mean! Haven’t I bought your verses? Haven’t I polished and corrected them, and made them fit to be seen? Am I not free to do what I please with my own?’

‘Yes—yes—you buy them. But I—oh! —I write them!’

‘Look here, child; I can have no nonsense. Before I took these verses of you, had you any opening or market for them?’

‘No. None at all.’

‘Nobody would buy them. They were not even returned by editors. They were thrown into the basket. Very well. I buy them on the condition that I do what I please with them. I give you three pounds—three

pounds—for a poem, if it is good enough for me to lick into shape. Then it becomes my own. It is a bargain. When you leave off wanting money you will leave off bringing me verses. Then I shall look for another girl. There are thousands of girls about who can write verses as good as these.'

The girl remained silent. What her employer said was perfectly true. And yet—and yet—it was not right.

'What more do you want?' he asked brutally.

'I am the author of these poems,' she said. 'And you are not.'

'Within these walls I allow you to say so—this once. Take care never to say so again. Outside these walls, if you say so, I will bring an action against you for libel and slander and defamation of character. Remember that. You had better, however, take these verses and go away.' He flung them at her feet. 'We will put an end to the arrangement.'

'No, no—I consent.' She humbly stooped

and picked them up. 'Do what you like with them. I am too poor to refuse. Do what you please.'

'It is your interest, certainly, to consent. Why, I paid you last year a hundred pounds. A hundred pounds! There's an income for a girl of twenty! Well, Effie, I forgive you. But no more nonsense. And give over crying.' For now she was sobbing and crying. 'Look here, Effie'—he laid his hand on hers—'some day, before long, I will put your verses in another column, with your name at the end—"Effie Wilmot." Come, will that do?'

'Oh! if you would! If you really would!'

'I really will, child. Don't think I care much about the thing. What does it matter to me whether I am counted a writer of society verses? It pleased me that the world should think me capable of these trifles while I am elaborating a really ambitious poem. One more little volume and I shall have done. Besides, all this time you are im-

proving. When you burst upon the world it will be with wings full-fledged and flight-sustained that you will soar to the stars. Fair poetess, I will make your fame assured. Be comforted.'

She looked up, tearful and happy. 'Oh, forgive me!' she said. 'Yes; I will do everything—exactly—as you want!'

'The world wants another poetess. You shall be that sweet singer. Let me be the first to acknowledge the gift divine.' He bowed and raised her hand and kissed the fingers of her shabby glove.

'Now, child,' he said, 'your visit has gained you another three pounds—here they are.'

She took the money, blushing again. The glowing prospect warmed her heart. But the three golden sovereigns chilled her again. She had parted with her child—her own. It was gone—and he would call it his, and pretend to be the father. And yet he was going to make such splendid amends to her.

‘How is your brother?’

‘He is always the same. He works all day at his play. In the afternoon he creeps out for a little on his crutches. In the future, Mr. Feilding, we are both going to be happy, he with his dramas, and I with my poems.’

‘Is his drama nearly ready?’

‘Very nearly.’

‘Tell him to let me read it. I can, at least, advise him.’

‘If you will! Oh! you are so kind. What we should have done without your help and the money you have given me, I do not know.’

‘You are welcome, sweet singer and heavenly poet.’ The great man took her hand and pressed it. ‘Now be thankful that you came here. You have cleared your mind of doubts, and you know what awaits you in the future. Bring your brother’s little play. I should like—yes, I should like to see what sort of a play he has written.’

She went away, happier for the prophecy.

## *ARMOREL OF LYONESSE*

In the dead of night she dreamed that she saw Mr. Alec Feilding carried along in a triumphal car to the Temple of Fame. The goddess herself, flying aloft in a white satin robe, blew the trumpet, and a nymph flying lower down—in white linen—put on the laurel crown and held it steady when the chariot bumped over the ruts. It was her crown—her own—that adorned those brows. Is it right? she asked again. Is it right?

Mr. Feilding, when she was gone, proceeded to copy out the poem carefully in his own handwriting, adding a few erasures and corrections so as to give the copy the hallmark of the poet's study. Then he threw the original upon the fire.

‘There!’ he said, ‘if Miss Effie Wilmot should have the audacity to claim these things as her own, at least I have the originals in my own handwriting—with my own corrections upon them, too, as they were sent to the printer. Yes, Effie, my dear; some day perhaps your verses shall appear



with your name to them. Not while they are so good, though. I only wish they were a little more masculine.'

Again he lugged out that manuscript, and resumed his copying, laboriously toiling on. The clock ticked, and the ashes dropped, and the silence was profound while he performed this intellectual feat.

At the stroke of noon the servant disturbed him a third time. He put away his work in the drawer, and went out to meet this visitor.

This time it was none other than a Lady of Quality—a Grande Dame de par le monde. She came in splendid attire, sailing into the studio like some richly-adorned pinnace or royal yacht. A lady of a certain age, but still comely in the eyes of man.

'Lady Frances!' cried Alec. 'This is, indeed, unexpected. And you know that it is the greatest honour for me to wait upon you.'

'Yes, yes; I know that. But I thought I should like to see you as you are—in your

own studio. So I came. I hope not at an inconvenient time.'

'No time could be inconvenient for a visit from you.'

'I don't know. Your model might be sitting to you. To be sure, you are not a figure-painter. But one always supposes that models are standing to artists all day long. Good-looking women, too, I believe. Perhaps you have got one hidden away behind the screen, just as they do on the stage. I will look.' She put up her glasses and walked across the room to look behind the screen. 'No: she has gone. Oh! is this your new picture?'

He bowed. 'I hope you like it.'

'I do,' she said, looking at it. 'It seems to me the very best thing you have done. Oh! it is really beautiful! Do you know, Mr. Feilding, that you are a very wonderful man?'

Alec laughed pleasantly. Of course he knew. 'If you think so,' he said.

'You write the most beautiful verses and

the most charming stories : you paint the most wonderful pictures : you belong to society, and you go everywhere. How do you do it ? How do you find time to do it ? I suppose you never want any sleep ? Poet, painter, novelist, journalist ! Are you a sculptor as well, by chance ?'

'Not yet. Perhaps——'

'Glutton ! Are you a dramatist ?'

'Again—not yet. Perhaps, some time——'

'Insatiate ! You are a Master of all the Arts. Alec Feilding, M.A.' He laughed pleasantly, again.

'You are the cleverest man in all London. Well : I sent you another story yesterday——'

'You did. I was about to write and thank you for it. Is it a true story ?'

'Quite true. It happened in my husband's family, thirty years ago. They are not very proud of it. You can dress it up somehow with new names.'

'Quite so. I shall rewrite the whole.'

'I don't mind. It is a great pleasure to

me to see the stories in print. And no one suspects poor little Me. Are they so *very* badly written?’

‘The style is a little—just a little, may I say?—jerky. But the stories are admirable. Do let me have some more, Lady Frances.’

‘Remember. No one is to know where you get them.’

‘A Masonic secrecy forms part of my character. I even put my own name to them for greater security.’

He did. Every week he put his own name to stories which he got from people like this Lady of Quality.

‘That ought to disarm suspicion. On the other hand, everybody must know that you cannot invent these things.’

Alec laughed. ‘Most people give me credit for inventing even your stories.’

‘By the way,’ she said, ‘are you coming to my dinner next week?’

‘With the greatest pleasure.’

‘If you don’t come you shall have no

more stories drawn from the domestic annals and the early escapades of the British Aristocracy.'

'I assure you, Lady Frances, I look forward with the greatest——'

'Very well, then. I shall expect you. And remember—secrecy.'

She laid her finger on her lips and vanished.

The smile faded out of the young man's face. He sat down again, and once more set himself to work doggedly copying out the manuscript, which was, indeed, none other than the story furnished him by Lady Frances. It was going to appear in the next week's issue of the journal, with his name at the end.

Was not Alec Feilding the cleverest all-round man in the whole of London—*Omnium artium magister*?

## CHAPTER V

## ONLY A SIMPLE SERVICE

MRS. ELSTREE took the card that the maid brought her. She started up, mechanically touched her hair—which was of the feathery and fluffy kind—and her dress, with the woman's instinct to see that everything was in order: the quick colour rose to her cheek—perhaps from the heat of the fire. ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I am at home.’ She was sitting beside the fire in the drawing-room of Armorel's flat. It was a cold afternoon in March: outside, a black east wind raged through the streets; it was no day for driving or for walking: within, soft carpets, easy-chairs, and bright fires invited one to stay at home. This lady, indeed, was one of those who love warmth and physical ease above all other things. Actually to

be warm, lazily warm, without any effort to feel warmth, afforded her a positive and distinct physical pleasure, just as a cat is pleased by being stroked. Therefore, though a book lay in her lap, she had not been reading. It is much pleasanter to lie back and feel warm, with half-closed eyes, in a peaceful room than to be led away by some impetuous novelist into uncomfortable places, cold places, fatiguing places.

She started, however, and the book fell to the floor, where it remained. And she rose to her feet when the owner of the card came in. The relict of Jerome Elstree was still young, and grief had as yet destroyed none of her beauty. She looked better, perhaps, in the morning—which says a great deal.

‘Alec?’ she murmured—her eyes as soft as her voice. ‘I thought you would come this afternoon.’

‘Are you quite alone, Mrs. Elstree?’ he asked with a look of warning.

‘Quite, Mr. Feilding. And, since the door is shut, and we are quite alone—why—

then——’ She laughed, held out both her hands, and put up her face like a child.

He took her hands and bent to kiss her lips.

‘Zoe,’ he said, ‘you grow lovelier every day. Last night——’ He kissed her again.

‘Lovelier than Philippa?’

‘What is Philippa beside you? An iceberg beside a—a garden of flowers——’

‘There is beauty in icebergs, I have read.’

‘Never mind Philippa, dear Zoe. She is nothing to us.’

‘I don’t mind her a bit, Alec, if you don’t. If you begin to mind her—— But we will wait until that happens. Why are you here to-day?’

‘I have come to call upon Mrs. Elstree, widow of my poor friend Jerome Elstree.’

‘Ce pauvre Jerome! The tears come into my eyes’—in fact, they did at that moment—‘look!—when I think of him. So often have I spoken of his virtues and his untimely fate that he has really lived. I never before under-



stood that there are ghosts of men who never lived as well as ghosts of the dead.'

'And I came to call upon your charge, Miss Rosevean.'

'Yes'—she said this dubiously, perhaps jealously—'so I supposed. Why did you send me here, Alec? You have always got some reason for everything. There was no need for my coming—I was doing as well as I expect to do.'

The young man looked about the room without replying to this question.

'Someone,' he said presently, 'has furnished this room who knows furniture.'

'It was Armorer herself. I have no taste—as you know.'

'And how do you get on with her? Are you happy here, Zoe?'

'I am as happy as I ever expect to be—until——'

'Yes, yes,' he interrupted, impatiently. 'You like her, then?'

'I like her as much as I can like any woman. You know, Alec, I am not greatly

in love with my own sex. If there were no other women in the world than just enough to dress me, get my dinner, and keep my house clean, I should not murmur. Eve was the happiest of women, in spite of the difficulties she must have had in keeping up with the fashion. Because, you see, she was the only woman.'

'No doubt. And now tell me about this girl.'

'She is rich. To be rich is everything. Money makes an angel of every woman. When I was eighteen, and first met you, Alec, I was rich. Then you saw the wings sticking out visibly one on each shoulder, didn't you? They are gone now—at least,' she looked over her shoulder, 'I see them no longer.'

'I heard she was rich. Where did the money come from?'

'It has been saving up for I don't know how long. The girl is only twenty-one, and she has about thirty thousand pounds, besides all kinds of precious things worth I don't know how much.'

‘Jagenal told me she was comfortably off—“comfortably,” he said—but—thirty thousand pounds!’

‘The mere thought of so much makes your eyes glow quite poetically, Alec. Write a poem on thirty thousand pounds. Well, that is what she has, and all her own, without any drawbacks: no nasty poor relations—no profligate brothers—to nibble and gnaw. She has not either brother or sister—an enviable lot when one has money. When one has no money a brother—a successful brother—might be useful.’

‘And how do you get on with her?’

‘I think we do pretty well together. But my post is precarious.’

‘Why?’

‘Because the young woman is pretty, rich, and masterful. It is a curious thing about women that the most masterful soonest find their master.’

‘You mean that she will marry.’

‘If she gets engaged, being rich, she will certainly marry at once. Until she marries I

believe we can get on together, because she is totally independent of me. This afternoon, for example, she has gone out to look at pictures somewhere, with a girl she has picked up somehow—a girl who writes.’

‘But, my dear Zoe, you must look after her. Don’t let her pick up girls and make friendships. You are here to look after her. I hoped that you would gain her complete confidence—become indispensable to her.’

‘Oh! that is why you sent me here? Pray, my dear Alec, what can Armorel be to you?’

‘Nothing, dear child,’ he replied, patting her soft hand, ‘that will bring any discord between you and me. But—make yourself indispensable and necessary to her.’

‘You will tell me, I dare say, presently, what you mean. But you don’t know this young islander. Necessary to me she is, as you know. Necessary to her I shall never become. We have nothing in common. I can do nothing for her at all, except go out to theatres and concerts and things in the even-

ing. Even then our tastes clash. I like to laugh ; she likes to sit solemnly with big eyes staring—so—as if she was receiving inspiration. I like comic operas, she likes serious plays ; I like dance music, she likes classical music ; I like the fool's paradise, she likes—the other kind, where they all behave so well and are under no illusions. In fact, Armored takes herself quite seriously all round. Of course, a girl with such a fortune can take herself anyhow she pleases.'

'She knows how to dress, apparently. Most advanced girls disdain dress.'

'But she is not an advanced girl. She is only a girl who knows a great deal. She is not in the least emancipated. Why, she still professes the Christian religion. She is just a girl who has set herself resolutely to learn all she can. She has been about it for five years. When she began, I understand that she knew nothing. What she means to do with her knowledge I have not learned. She talks French and German and Italian. You have heard her play? Very well : you can't beat

that. You shall see some of her drawings. They are rather in your style, I think. A highly cultivated girl. That is all.'

'A female prig? A consciously superior person?'

'Not a bit. Rather humble-minded. But masterful and independent. Where she fails is, of course, in ordinary talk. She can't talk—she can only converse. She doesn't know the pictures and painters, and poets and novelists of the day—she doesn't know a single person in society. She doesn't know any personal history at all. And she doesn't care about any. That is Armorel.'

'I see,' he replied thoughtfully. 'Things will be difficult, I am afraid.'

'What things? Oh! there is another point in which she differs from people of society.'

'Yes?'

'When you and I, dear Alec, think and talk of people, we conclude that they are exactly like ourselves—do we not? Quite worldly and selfish, you know. Everyone

with his little show to run for himself. Now, Armored, on the other hand, concludes that everyone is like—not us—but herself. Do you catch the difference? There is a difference, you know.'

'Sometimes, Zoe, I seem not to understand you. But never mind. Under your influence——'

'I have no influence at all with her. I never shall have.'

'But, my dear Zoe, why are you here? I want you—I repeat—to exercise an overwhelming influence.'

'Oh! It is impossible. Consider—you who know me so well—how can I influence a girl who is always seeking after great things? She wants everything noble and lofty and pure. She has what they call a great soul—and I—oh! Alec, you know that I belong to the infinitely little souls. There are a great, great number of us, but we are very contemptible.'

'Let us think,' he replied. 'Let us contrive and devise some way——'

‘Enough about Armorel. Tell me now about yourself.’

‘I am always the same.’

‘You have come, perhaps, this afternoon,’ she murmured softly, ‘to bring me some new hope—Oh ! Alec—at last—some hope?’

‘I have no new hope to give you, child.’

Both sat in silence, looking into the fire-light.

‘It is seven years—seven years,’ said Zoe, ‘since I had my great quarrel with Philippa. She was eighteen then—and so was I—I charged her with throwing herself at your head, you know. So she did. So she does still. Why, the woman can’t conceal, even now, that she loves you. I saw it in her eyes last night, I saw it in her attitude when she was talking to you. She swore after the row we had that she would never speak to me again. But you see she has broken that vow. I was eighteen then, and I was rich, a good deal richer than Philippa ever will be. When you and I became engaged I was twenty-one. That is four years ago, Alec. Yet, a year or



two, and the girl you were—engaged to—will be thin and faded. For your sake, my dear boy, I hope that you will not keep her waiting very much longer before you present her to the world.'

'My dear child, could I help the smash that came—the smash and scandal? When the whole town was ringing with your father's smash and his suicide, and the ruin of I don't know how many people, was that the moment for us to step forward and take hands before the world?'

'No; you certainly could not. As a man of the world, you would have been justified in breaking off the thing—especially as it was only a day or two old.'

'I could not let you go, Zoe,' he said, with a touch of real tenderness. 'I was madly in love.'

'I think you were, Alec. I really think that at the time you were truly and madly in love. Else you would never have done a thing of which you repented the next day.'

‘I have never repented, dear Zoe—never once.’

‘Perhaps you calculated that something would be saved out of the smash. Perhaps, for once in your life, you never calculated at all upon anything. Well—I consented to keep the thing a secret.’

‘You know that it was necessary.’

‘You said so. I obeyed. But four years—four years—and no prospect of a termination. Consider!’ She pleaded as she had spoken before, in the same soft, caressing, murmuring tone.

‘I do consider, Zoe. You can have your freedom again. I have no right——’

‘Nonsense! My freedom? It is your own that you want. My freedom?’ she repeated, but without raising her voice. ‘Mine? What could I do with it—now? Whither could I turn? Do not, I advise you, think that I will ever while I live restore your freedom to you.’

‘I spoke in your own interest, believe me.’

‘I am now what you have made me. You

know what that is. You know what I was four years ago.'

'I have advised you, it is true.'

'No; you have led me. At the moment of my greatest trouble you made me break away from my own people, who were sorry for my misfortunes, and would have kept me among them in my own circle. There was no reason for me to leave them. The wreck of my father's fortune was not imputed to me. You persuaded me to assert my own independence, and to go upon the stage, for which I was as well fitted as for the kingdom of heaven.'

'I hoped—I thought—that you would succeed.'

'No; what you hoped and intended was to keep me in your power. You would not let me go, and you could not—or would not——'

'Could not, my child. I could not.'

'For four years I have endured the humiliations of the actress who is a failure and can only take the lowest parts. You

know what I have endured, and yet——  
Oh ! Alec, your love is, indeed, a noble gift !  
And now, for your sake, I am here, playing a  
part for you. I am the young widow of the  
man who never existed. I make up a hun-  
dred lies every day to a girl who believes  
every word—which makes it more disgraceful  
and more horrible. When one knows that  
she is disbelieved it is different.’

‘Zoe, you know my position.’

‘Very well, indeed. You live in a little  
palace. You keep your man-servant and  
your two horses. You go every day into  
some kind of good society——’

‘It is necessary : my position demands it.’

‘Your position, my friend, has nothing to  
do with it. If you stayed at home every  
evening just as many copies of your paper  
would be sold. You spend all this money on  
yourself, Alec, because you are a selfish per-  
son and indulgent, and because you like to  
make a great show of success.’

‘You do not understand.’

‘Oh, yes, I do ! You paint lovely pic-

tures, which you sell: you write admirable stories and excellent verses—at least, I suppose they are admirable and excellent. You put them into a paper which is your own——

‘Yes—yes. But all these things leave me as poor as I was four years ago.’

He got up and stood before the fire, looking into it. Then he walked across to the window and gazed into the street. Then he returned and looked into the fire again. This restlessness may be a sign that something is on a man’s mind.

‘Zoe,’ he said at length, without looking at her, ‘your impatience makes you unjust. You do not understand. Things have come to a crisis.’

‘What kind of a crisis?’

‘A financial crisis. I must have money.’

‘Then go and make it. Paint more pictures: write more poetry. Make money, as other men do. It is very noble and grand to pretend that you only work when you please; but it isn’t business, and it isn’t true.’

‘Again—you do not understand. I must have money in a short time, or else——’

‘Else—what may happen, Alec?’ She leaned forward, losing her murmuring manner for the first time.

‘I may—I must—become bankrupt. That to me signifies social ruin.’

‘You have something more to say. Won’t you say it at once?’

‘If I can get over this difficulty it will be all right—my anxieties over. I thought, Zoe, when I sent you here, that, with a girl rich, mistress of her own, of age, it would be easy for you to wind yourself into her confidence and borrow—or beg, or somehow get what I want out of her. To borrow would be best.’

‘How much do you want? Tell me exactly.’

‘I want, before the end of next month, about 3,000*l.* Say, 3,500*l.*’

‘That is a very large sum of money.’

‘Not to this girl. Make her lend it to you. Make up some story. Beg it or bor-

row it—and——’ he laid his hand upon her shoulder, but she made no movement in reply; he stooped and kissed her head, but she did not look up. ‘Zoe—I swear—if you will do this for me, our long and weary waiting shall be at an end. I will acknowledge everything. I will give up this extravagant life: we will settle down like a couple of honest bourgeois: we will live over the shop if you like—that is, the publishing office of the paper.’ He took her hand and raised it to his lips, but she made no response.

‘Would she ever get the money back again?’

‘Perhaps. How can I tell?’

‘Even for the bribe you offer, Alec, I am afraid I cannot do it.’

‘We will try together. We will lay ourselves out to attract the girl, to win her confidence. Consider. She is alone. She is in our hands——’

‘Yes, yes. But you do not know her. Alec, if I cannot succeed, what will you do?’

‘I must look out for some girl with money

and get engaged to her. The mere fact of an engagement would be enough for me.'

'Yes,' she said quickly, 'it would have to be. Will you get engaged to—to Philippa?'

'No; Philippa will only have money at the death of her father and mother—not before. Philippa is out of the question.'

'Is there nobody among all your fine friends who will lend you the money?'

'No one. We do not lend money to each other. We go on as if there were no money difficulties in the world, as well as no diseases, no old age, no dying. We do not speak of money.'

'Friendship in society has its limits. Yes; I see. But can't you borrow it in the usual way of business people?'

'I should have to show books and enter into unpleasant explanations. You see, Zoc, the paper has got a very good name, but rather a small circulation. Everybody sees it, but very few buy it.'

'And so you heard of Armorel, and you thought that here was a chance. You say to



me, in plain words : “ If you get this money, there shall be an end of the false position.” Is that so ? ’

‘ That is exactly what I do say and swear, Zoe. It is a very simple thing. You have only to persuade the girl to lend you this money, or to advance it, or to invest it by your agency—or something—a very simple and easy thing. You love me well enough to do me such a simple service.’

‘ I love you well enough, I suppose,’ she replied sadly, ‘ to do everything you tell me to do. A simple service ! Only to deceive and plunder this girl, who believes us all to be honourable and truthful ! ’

‘ Oh, we shall find a way—some way—to pay her back. Don’t be afraid. And don’t go off into platitudes, Zoe—you are much too pretty—and when it is done, and you are openly, before the world——’

‘ I know you well enough to know how much happiness to expect. I am a fool. All women are fools. Philippa is a fool. And I’ve set my foolish heart on—you. If I fail—

if I fail'—her words sank to the softest and gentlest murmur—'you are going to cast about for an heiress, and you will get engaged to her, and then—then—we shall see, dear Alec, what will happen then.' She sat up, her cheek fiery, and her eyes flashing, though her voice was so soft. 'Hush!' she whispered. 'I hear Armorel's step!'

They heard her voice as well outside, loud and clear.

'Come to my own room,' she said. 'What you want is there. This way.'

'It is the girl with her—the girl who writes. They have gone into her own room—her boudoir—her study—where she works half the day. The girl lives with her brother, close by.'

They listened, silent, with hushed breath, like conspirators.

'Poor Armorel!' said Zoe. 'If she only knew what we are plotting! She thinks me the most truthful of women! And all I am here for is to cheat her out of her money! Don't you think I had better make a clean

breast and ask her to give me the money and let me go ?’

‘Begin to-day,’ said Alec. ‘Begin to talk about me. Interest her in me. Let her know how great and good——’

‘Hush !’

Then they heard her voice again in the hall.

‘No—no—you must come this evening. Bring Archie with you. I will play, and he shall listen. You shall both listen. And then great thoughts will come to you.’

‘Always great thoughts—great thoughts—great pictures,’ Zoe murmured. ‘And we are so infinitely little. Brother worm, shall we crawl into some hole and hide ourselves ?’

Then the door opened, and Armored herself appeared, fresh and rosy in spite of the cold wind.

‘My dear child,’ said Zoe softly, looking up from her cushions, ‘come in and sit down. You must be perishing with the east wind. Do sit down and be comfortable. You met Mr. Feilding last night, I believe.’

The visitor remained for a quarter of an hour. Armorel had been to see a certain picture in the National Gallery. He talked of pictures just as, the night before, he had talked of music: that is to say, as one who knows all the facts about the painters and their works and their schools: their merits and their defects. He knew and could talk fluently the language of the Art Critic, just as he knew and could talk the language of the Musical Critic. Armorel listened. Now and then she made a remark. But her manner lacked the reverence with which most maidens listened to this thrice-gifted darling of the Muses. She actually seemed not to care very much what he said.

Zoe, for her part, lay back in her cushions in silence.

‘How do you like him?’ she asked, when their visitor left them.

‘I don’t know; I haven’t thought about him. He talks too much, I think. And he talks as if he was teaching.’

‘No one has a better right to talk with authority.’

‘But we are free to listen or not as we please. Why has he the right to teach everybody?’

‘My dear child, Alec Feilding is the cleverest man in all London.’

‘He must be very clever, then. What does he do?’

‘He does everything—poetry, painting, fiction—everything!’

‘Oh, you will show me his poetry, perhaps, some time? And his pictures I suppose we shall see in May somewhere. He doesn’t look as if he was at all great. But one may be wrong.’

‘My dear Armored, you are a fortunate girl, though you do not understand your good fortune. Alec—I am privileged to call him Alec—has conceived a great interest in you. Oh, not of the common love kind, that you despise so much—nothing to do with your *beaux yeux*—but on account of your genius. He was greatly taken with your playing: if you will show him your pictures he will give

you instruction that may be useful to you. He wants to know you, my dear.'

'Well,' said Armorel, not in the least overwhelmed, 'he can if he pleases, I suppose, since he is a friend of yours.'

'That is not all : he wants your friendship as a sister in art. Such a man—such an offer, Armorel, must not be taken lightly.'

'I am not drawn towards him,' said the girl. 'In fact, I think I rather dislike his voice, which is domineering ; and his manner, which seems to me self-conscious and rather pompous ; and his eyes, which are too close together. Zoe, if he were not the cleverest man in London, I should say that he was the most crafty.'

Zoe laughed. 'What man discovers by experiment and experience,' she murmured, incoherently, 'woman discovers at a glance. And yet they say——'

## CHAPTER VI

## THE OTHER STUDIO

THE Failure was at work in his own studio. Not the large and lofty chamber fitted and furnished as if for Michael Angelo himself, which served for the Fraud. Not at all. The Failure did his work in a simple second-floor back, a chamber in a commonplace lodging-house of Keppel Street, Bloomsbury. Nowhere in the realms of Art was there a more dismal studio. The walls were bare, save for one picture which was turned round and showed its artistic back. The floor had no carpet : there was no other furniture than a table, strewn and littered with sketches, paints, palettes, brushes : there were canvases leaning against the wall : there was a portfolio also leaning against the wall : there was an

easel and the man standing before it: and there was a single chair.

For three years Roland Lee had withdrawn from his former haunts and companions. No one knew now where he lived: he had not exhibited: he had resigned his membership at the club: he had gone out of sight. Many London men every year go out of sight. It is quite easy. You have only to leave off going to the well-known places of resort: very soon—so soon that it is humiliating only to think of it—men cease asking where you are: then they cease speaking of you: you are clean gone out of their memory—you and your works—it is as if the sea had closed over you. There is not left a trace or a sign of your existence. Perhaps, now and then, something may revive your name: some little adventure may be remembered: some frolic of youth—for the rest—nothing: Silence: Oblivion. It does, indeed, humiliate those who look on. When such an accident revived the memory of Roland Lee, one would ask another what had become of him. And no



one knew. But, of course, he had gone down—down—down. When a man disappears it means that he sinks. He had gone out of sight: therefore he had gone under. Yet, when you climb, you can never get so high as to be invisible. Even the President, R.A., is not invisible. Again, the higher that a balloon soars the smaller does it grow; but the higher a man climbs up the Hill of Fame the bigger does he show. It is quite certain that when a man has disappeared he has sunk. The only question—and this can never be answered—is, what becomes of the men who sink? One man I heard of—also, like Roland, an artist—who has been traced to a certain tavern, where he fuddles himself every evening, and where you may treat with him for the purchase of his pictures at ten shillings—ay, or even five shillings—apiece. And two scholars—scholars gone under—I heard of the other day. They now reside in the same lodging-house. It is close to the Gray's Inn Road. One lives in the garret, and the other occupies the cellar. In the evening they get

drunk together and dispute on points of the finer scholarship. But this only accounts for three. And where are all the rest?

Of Roland Lee nobody knew anything. There was no story or scandal attached to him: he was no drinker: he was no gambler: he was no profligate. But he had vanished.

Yet he had not gone far—only to Keppel Street, which is really a central place. Here he occupied a second floor, and lived alone. Nobody ever called upon him: he had no friends. Sometimes he sat all day long in his studio doing nothing: sometimes he went forth, and wandered about the streets: in the evening he dined at restaurants where he was certain to meet none of his old friends. He lived quite alone. As to that rumour concerning opium, it was an invention of his employer and proprietor. He did not take opium. Day after day, however, he grew more moody. What developments might have followed in this lonely life I know not. Opium, perhaps: whisky, perhaps: melan-

cholia, perhaps. And from melancholia—  
Good Lord deliver us!

One thing saved him. The work which filled his soul with rage also kept his soul from madness. When the spirit of his Art seized him and held him he forgot everything. He worked as if he was a free man: he forgot everything, until the time came when he had to lay down his palette and to come back to the reality of his life. Some men would have accepted the position: there were, as we have seen, compensations of a solid and comfortable kind: had he chosen to work his hardest, these golden compensations might have run into four figures. Some men might have sat and laughed among their friends, forgetting the ignominy of their slavery. Not so Roland. His chains jangled as he walked; they cut his wrists and galled his ankles: they filled him with so much shame that he was fain to go away and hide himself. And in this manner he enjoyed the great success which his employer had achieved for his pictures. To arrive at the success for which

you have always longed and prayed—and to enjoy it in such a fashion. Oh! mockery of fate!

This morning he was at work contentedly—with ardour. He was beginning a picture from one of his sketches: it was to be another study of rocks and sea: as yet there was little to show: it was growing in his brain, and he was so fully wrapped in his invention that he did not hear the door open, and was not conscious that for the first time within three years he had a visitor.

She opened the door and stood for a moment looking about her. The bare and dingy walls, the scanty furniture, the meanness of the place, made her very soul sink within her. For they cried aloud the story of the painter.

For five long years she had thought of him. He was successful: he was rising to the top of the tree: he was conquering the world—so brave, so strong, so clever! There was no height to which he could not rise. She should find him splendid, triumphant,

and yet modest—her old friend the same, but glorified. And she found him thus, in this dingy den—so low, so shabby! Consider, if she had risen while he was sinking, how great was now the gulf between them! Then she stepped into the room and stood beside the artist at his easel.

‘Roland Lee,’ she whispered.

He started, looked up, and recognised her. ‘Armored!’ he cried.

Then, strange to say, instead of hastening to meet and greet her, and to hold out hands of welcome, he stood gazing at her stupidly, his face changing colour from crimson to white. His hair was unkempt, she saw; his cheeks worn; his eyes haggard, with deep lines round them; and his dress was shabby and uncared for.

‘You have not forgotten me, then?’ she said.

‘Forgotten you? No. How could I forget you?’

‘Then are you pleased to see me? Shake hands with me, Roland Lee.’

He complied, but with restraint. 'Have you dropped from the clouds?' he asked. 'How did you find me here?'

'I met your old friend Dick Stephenson. He told me that you lived here. You are no longer friends: but he has seen you going in and coming out. That is how I found you. Are you well, Roland?'

'Yes, I am well.'

'Does all go well with you, my old friend?'

'Why not? You see—I have got a magnificent studio: there is every outward sign of wealth and prosperity: and if you look into any art-criticisms you will find the papers ringing with my name.'

'You are changed.' Armorel passed over the bitterness of this speech. 'You are a little older, perhaps.' She did not tell him how haggard and worn he looked, how unkempt and unhappy.

'Let me see some of your work,' she said. The picture on the easel was only in its very first stages. She looked about the room. Nothing on the walls but one picture with its

face turned round. 'May I look at this?' She turned it round. It was the picture of herself, 'The Princess of Lyonesse,' the sketch of which he had finished on the last day of his holiday. 'Oh!' she cried, 'I remember this. And you have kept it, Roland—you have kept it. I am glad.'

'Yes, I have kept the only picture which I can call my own.'

'Was I like that in those days?'

'You are like that now. Only, the little Princess has become a tall Queen.'

'Yes, yes; I remember. You said, then, that if I should ever look like this, you would be proved to be a painter indeed. Roland, you are a painter indeed.'

'No, no,' he said; 'I am nothing—nothing at all.'

'We were talking—when you made this sketch—of how one can grow to his highest and noblest.'

'I have grown to my lowest,' he replied. 'But you—you——'

'What has happened, my friend? You

told me so much once about yourself—you taught me so much—you put so many new things into my head—you must tell me more! What has happened?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Why are you here in this poor room? I have been to studios in Rome and Florence, and Paris and Vienna: they are lovely rooms, fit for a man whose mind is always full of lovely images and sweet thoughts. But this—this room is not a studio. It is an ugly little prison. How can light and colour visit such a place?’

‘It explains itself. It proclaims aloud—Failure—Failure—Failure!’

‘This picture is not Failure.’

‘My name is unknown. I work on like a mole under ground. I am a Failure. You have seen Dick Stephenson. What did he say of me?’

‘He said that you must have left off working. But you have not.’

‘What does it matter how much or how long a Failure goes on working?’



‘Have you lost heart, Roland?’

‘Heart, and hope, and faith. Everything is lost, Armorel!’

‘You have lost your courage because you have failed. But many men have failed at first—great men. Robert Browning failed for years. You were brave once, Roland. You were able to say that if you knew you were doing good work you cared nothing for the critics.’

‘You see, Dick was right. I no longer do any work. I never send anything to the exhibitions.’

‘But why—why—why?’

‘Ask me no more questions, Armorel. Go away and leave me. How beautiful and glorious you have grown, child! But I knew you would. And I have gone down so low, and—and—well, you see! Yes. I remember how we talked of growing to our full height. We did not think, you see, of the depths to which we might also drop. There are awful depths, which you could never guess.’

He sank into the chair, and his head dropped.

Armored stood over him, the tears gathering into her eyes.

‘Roland,’ she laid her hand upon his shoulder—there is no action more sisterly—‘since I have found you I shall not let you go again. It is five years since you went away. You will tell me about yourself, when you please. I have a great deal to tell you. Don’t you remember how sympathetic you used to be in the old days? I want a great deal more sympathy now, because I am five years older, and I am trying so much. I want you to hear me play—you were the first who ever praised my playing, you know. And you must see my drawings. I have worked every day, as I promised you I would. I have remembered all your instructions. Come and see your pupil’s work, my master.’

He made no reply.

‘You live too much alone,’ she went on, ‘Dick Stephenson told me that you have

given up your club, and that you go nowhere, and that no one knows how you live. You have dropped quite away from your old friends. Why did you do that? You live in this dismal room by yourself—alone with your thoughts: no wonder you lose courage and faith.’ She opened the portfolio and drew out a number of the sketches. ‘Why,’ she said, ‘here are some of those you made with me. Here is Castle Bryher—you in the boat, and I on the ledge among the seaweed under the great rock—and the shags in a row on the top: and here is Porth Cressa—and here Peninnis—and here Round Island. Oh! we have so many things to talk about. Will you come to see me?’

‘You had better leave me alone, Armorel,’ he said. ‘Even you can do no good to me now.’

‘When will you come? See—I will write down my address. I have a flat, and it is ever so much better furnished than this, Sir. Will you come to-night? I shall be at home. There will be no one but Effie Wilmot. Oh!

I am not going to talk about you, but about myself. I want your praise, Roland, and your sympathy. Both were so ready—once. Will you come to-night?’

‘You will drive me mad, I think, Armorel!’

‘Will you come?’

He shook his head.

‘I have got to tell you how I became rich, if you will listen. You must come and hear my news. Why, there is no one but you in all London who knew me when I lived on Samson alone with those old people. You will come to-night, Roland?’ Again she laid her hand upon his shoulder. ‘I will ask no questions about you—none at all. You will tell me what you please about yourself. But you must let me talk to you about myself, as frankly as in the old days. If you have got any kindly memory left of me at all, Roland, you will come.’

He rose and lifted his shameful eyes to hers, so full of pity and of tears.

‘Yes,’ he said; ‘I will do whatever you tell me.’

## CHAPTER VII

## A CANDID OPINION

YOUTH in the London lodging-house ! Youth quite poor—youth ambitious—youth with a possible future—youth meditating great things ! Walk along the streets of Lodging-land—there are miles of such streets—and consider with trembling that the dingy houses contain thousands of young people—boys and girls—who have come to the city of golden pavements to make—not a fortune, unless that happens as well—but their name. In the long struggle before the lowest rung of the ladder is reached they endure hardness, but they complain not. Everything is going to be made up to them in the splendid time to come.

Something more than a year ago two such

young people came up from the country, and found shelter in a London lodging-house, where they could work and study until success should arrive. They were boy and girl, brother and sister—twins. They had very little money, and could afford no more than one sitting-room. Therefore, one worked in the sitting-room and the other in a bedroom, because their occupations demanded solitude. The one in the sitting-room was the girl. She was engaged in the pursuit of poetry: she made verses continually, every day. Unless she was reading verse, she was either making, or polishing, or devising verses. Of all pursuits in the world, this is at once the most absorbing and the most delightful. It is also, with the greater part of these who follow it, the most useless. Thomas the Rhymer sits down and takes his pen: it is nine of the clock. He considers: he writes: he scratches out: he writes again: he corrects again: after ten minutes or so, he looks up. It is three in the afternoon: the luncheon hour is past: the morning is gone: all he has

to show for the six golden hours, when an account of them is demanded, will be a single stanza of a ballade. And perhaps not a single editor will look at it. To Effie Wilmot, the girl-twin, thus engaged morning after morning, the hours become moments and the days minutes. The result and outcome of her labours you have already learned. But she was young, and she lived in hope. A few more weeks, and the great man, her patron, would have satisfied that whim of wishing to be thought a poet of society. Strange that one who painted pictures of such wonderful beauty, who wrote such charming stories in such endless variety—stories quaint and bizarre, stories pathetic, stories humorous—should so condescend! What could a few simple verses—such as hers—do to increase his fame? However, that was nearly over. She felt quite happy and light-hearted: as happy as if, like other poets, she was writing things that would appear with her own name: she pursued the light and airy fancies of her brain, capturing one or two, chaining

them in the prison of her rhymes, which, of course, were set to the old-new tunes affected by the little poets of the day. If they have got no message to deliver, they can at least come on the stage and repeat over again the old things clad in dress revived. We can keep on dressing up in the poet's habit until the poet himself shall come along.

Effie worked on, sitting at the window. Poets can work anywhere, though, of course, they ought to sit habitually on the sides of hills, with hanging woods and mountain-streams and waterfalls. But they can work just as well in a mean London lodging, such as this where Effie sat, looking out, if she looked through the curtain, upon a most commonplace street. We can all—common spirits as well as poets—rise above our streets and houses and our dingy setting—otherwise there would be no work done at all. Nay, if we were all cockered up, and daintily surrounded with things æsthetic and artistic and beautiful, I believe we should be so happy that nobody would ever do anything. The



poet would murmur his thoughts in indolent rhyme by the fireside: the musician would drop his fingers among the notes, echoing faintly and imperfectly the music in his soul—all for his own enjoyment: the story-teller would tell his stories to his wife: the dramatist would make plots without words for his children to act: the painter would half sketch his visions and leave them unfinished. Art would die.

No such temptations were offered to Effie. The æsthetic movement had not touched that ground-floor front. The shaky round table stood under the flaring gas which every night made her head ache: the chiffonier contained in its recesses the tea and sugar and bread and butter, and, when the money ran to such luxuries, her jam or her honey or her oranges. There was one easy-chair and one arm-chair; and before the window a small square table, which had, at least, the merit of being firm; and at this she wrote. Everybody knows this kind of room perfectly.

The poetic workshop is always kept

locked. No poet ever tells of the terrific struggles he has to encounter before he finally subdues his thought and compels it to walk or run in double harness of rhythm and rhyme. No poet ever confesses how he sometimes has to let that thought go because he cannot subdue it—nay, the same discomfiture has been reported of those who, like M. Jourdain, speak in prose. And no poet ever shows, as a painter will readily show us, the first sketch, the first rough draft of a poem, the unfinished lines, the first feeble attempts at the rhythmic expression of a great thought. Let us respect the mystery of the craft—have we not all dabbled in verse and essayed to play upon the scrannel-pipe?

It was towards noon, however, that Effie was disturbed by the arrival of a visitor. The event was so unusual—so unprecedented even—that no instructions had ever been given to the lodging-house servant in the art of introducing callers. She therefore opened the door, and put in her head—‘A gentle-

man, Miss ——and went downstairs, leaving the gentleman to walk in if he pleased.

‘You, Mr. Feilding?’ Effie cried, springing to her feet. ‘Oh! This is, indeed——’

The great man took her hand. ‘My dear child,’ he said, ‘I have been thinking over our conversation of the other day. I am, of course, only anxious to be of service to you and to your brother, and so I thought I would call.’ He was quite magnificent in his fur-lined coat, and he was very tall and big, so that he seemed to fill up the whole room. But he had an unusual air of hesitation. ‘I thought,’ he repeated, ‘that I would call. Yes——’

The girl sat with her hands in her lap, waiting.

‘You remember what I told you about—the—the verses which you sometimes bring me——’

‘Oh! Yes. I remember. It is so kind of you, Mr. Feilding, so very kind and noble——’ For the moment the dazzling prospect of seeing her verses acknowledged

as her own in place of seeing them adopted by the Editor, made her believe that none but a truly noble person could do such a thing.

‘I mean to begin even sooner than I had intended. It is true that when I took your verses I made them my own by those little touches and corrections which, as you know very well, distinguish true poetry from its imitation’—It was not until he was gone that Effie remembered that not a single alteration had ever been made. So great is the power of the human voice that for the moment she listened and acquiesced, subdued and ashamed of herself—‘At last, my young friend, the time for alteration and improvement is past. You can now stand alone—your verses signed—if, of course, we remain, as I hope, on the same friendly relations.’

‘Oh!’ she murmured.

‘Enough. We understand each other. Your brother, you told me, is at work on a play—a romantic drama.’

‘Yes. He has finished it. He has been

at work upon it for two years, thinking of nothing else all day.'

Mr. Feilding nodded approval.

'That is the way,' he said heartily, 'to produce good work. Perfect—absolute—devotion—regardless of any earthly consideration. Art—Art—before all else. And now it is done?'

'Yes; he is copying it out.'

'Effie'—he suddenly changed the subject—'you have never told me of your resources. Tell me! I do not ask out of idle curiosity. That you are not rich I know——'

'No, we are not rich. We have a little—a thousand pounds apiece—and we have resolved to live on that, and on what we can get besides, until we have made our way. We have no rich relations to help us. My father is a country clergyman with a small living. We came to town so that Archie could get treatment for his hip. He is better now, and we shall stay altogether if we can only hold on.'

‘A thousand pounds each. That is seventy pounds a year, I suppose?’

‘Yes. But during the last twelve months you have given me a hundred pounds for my verses—three pounds for every poem, and there were thirty-three altogether in the volume—“Voices and Echoes,” you know.’

The poet who had published these verses did not change colour or show any sign of emotion in the presence of the poet who had written them. He nodded his head. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘on a hundred and seventy pounds a year you can live—on seventy you would starve. Where is your brother?’

‘He works in his bedroom. It is the room behind, on the same floor. My room is upstairs.’

‘He requires, I suppose, good food, wine, and certain luxuries?’

‘When we can afford them. Since you took my verses we have been able to buy things.’

‘Your money is well expended. I should like to see your brother, Effie.’

‘I will take you to him,’ she said. But she hesitated and blushed. ‘Oh! Mr. Feilding, Archie knows nothing about the—the volumes, you know!’ He sees only the verses in the paper. And he only knows that you have been so kind as to take them. Don’t tell him anything else.’

‘Your secret, Effie,’ he replied generously, ‘is safe with me. He shall not know it from my lips.’

She thanked him. Again, it was not until he was gone that Effie remembered that he could not possibly reveal that fact to her brother.

She led him into the room, at the back of which was her brother’s study and bedroom as well.

Her brother might have been herself, save for a slight manly growth upon the upper lip, and for the pale cheek of ill-health. The same large forehead overhanging the face, eyes sunken but as bright as his sister’s, the same sensitive lips were his. A finer face than his sister’s, and stronger, but not so sweet.

Beside his chair a pair of crutches proclaimed that he was a cripple. Before him was a table, at which he was writing. There were on the table, besides his writing materials, a number of little dolls, some of which were arranged in groups, while others were lying about unused. He was copying his finished play : as he copied it he played the scenes with the dolls and spoke the dialogue. The dolls were his characters : there was not a single scene or change of the grouping which this conscientious young dramatist had not rehearsed over and over again, until every line of the dialogue had its own stage picture, clear and distinct in his mind.

‘You are Mr. Feilding?’ he asked, rising with some difficulty. ‘I have heard so much of you from Effie. It is a great honour to have a call from you.’

‘I take a deep interest,’ the great man replied, ‘in anything that concerns Miss Effie Wilmot. I have been able—I believe you know—to give her some assistance and advice in her work. Oh!’—he waved his hand to



deprecate any expressions of gratitude—‘I have done very little—very little indeed. Now, about yourself. I learn from your sister that you have ambitions—you would become a dramatist?’

‘I have no other ambition. It is my only dream.’

‘A very good dream indeed. And you have made, I am told, a start—a maiden effort—a preliminary flight to try your wings. You have written your first attempt at a play?’

‘Yes. It is here. It is finished.’

‘Tell me, briefly, the plot.’

Some young dramatists mar their plot in getting it out. This young man had taken the trouble to write out first a rough outline of his piece and next a complete scenario with every situation detailed. These he read to his visitor one after the other.

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Feilding, when he had finished; ‘there is something in the idea of the play. Perhaps not a completely novel *motif*. A good deal might be said as to the arrangement of the scenes. And one or two

of the characters might—but these are details. Remains to find out how the dialogue goes. Will you read me a scene or two?’

The dramatist read. As he read he might have observed in the eyes of his listener a growing eagerness, as of one who vehemently yearns to get possession of something—his neighbour’s vineyard, for example, or his solitary ewe lamb. But the reader did not observe this. He was wholly wrapped in his piece: he threw his soul into the reading: he was anxious only that his words and his situations should produce the best effect upon his hearer.

‘Yes, yes; your dialogue, unhappily, shows the want of skill common to the beginner,’ said Mr. Feilding, when he had finished. ‘It will have to be completely rewritten. As it stands now, the play would be simply killed by it, in spite of the situations, which, with some alterations, are really pretty good—pretty good for a first effort.’

‘You don’t think, then—that——’ the dramatist’s voice broke down. Consider: for

two long years he had done nothing but cast, recast, write, rewrite this play. He had dreamed all this time of success with this play. And now—now—the very first critic—and that the most accomplished man of the day—no less than Mr. Alec Feilding—told him that the play would not be received unless the dialogue was entirely rewritten. He *could* not rewrite the dialogue. It was a part of himself. As well ask him to remake his own face or to reconstruct his legs. His face fell : his cheeks grew pale : his eyes filled with unmanly tears.

‘I am truly sorry, believe me,’ said the critic, ‘to throw cold water on your hopes. I have been myself an aspirant. Yet’—he hesitated in his kindness—‘why encourage illusive expectations? The play as it is—I say, as it is only—must be pronounced totally unfit for the stage. No manager would think of it for a moment.’

‘Then I may as well throw it on the fire? And all my work wasted!’

‘Nay—not wasted. Good work—true

work—is never wasted. You ought to have learned much—very much—from this two years' labour. And, as for putting it into the fire—he laughed genially—‘I believe I can show you a better way than that. Look here, Archie—I call you by your Christian name because I have so often talked about you : we are old friends—I should be really sorry to think that you had actually lost all your time. Give me this play : I will take it—skeleton, scenario, dialogue—all, just as it is—the mere rough, crude, shapeless thing that it is. I will buy it of you—useless as it is. I will give you fifty pounds down for it, and it shall become my property—my own, absolutely. I shall then, perhaps, recast and rewrite the play from beginning to end. When I have made a play out of it worth putting on the stage—when, in short, I have made it my own play—I may possibly bring it out—possibly. Most likely, however, not. There's a chance for you, Archie, such as you will never get again ! Fifty pounds down—think of that ! Fifty pounds !’

The dramatist laid his hand, for reply, upon his papers.

‘If it should ever be brought out,’ this good Samaritan went on, ‘you will come and see it acted. What a splendid lesson it will be for you in the art of writing drama!’

The dramatist’s fingers tightened on his manuscript.

‘Of course you must consider your sister,’ the considerate critic continued. ‘She has been able to make a few pounds of late, having been so fortunate as to attract the interest of . . . one who is not wholly without influence. Should that interest fail or be withdrawn you might have—both of you—to suffer much privation. The luxuries which you now enjoy would be impossible—and——’

‘Oh, you kill me!’ cried the unfortunate youth.

‘Shall I leave you for the present? My offer is always open—on the condition of secrecy—one is bound to keep business transactions secret. I will leave you now. There

is no hurry. Think it over carefully and send me an answer.'

He went out and shut the door. The young dramatist, I am ashamed to say, fell to tears and weeping over the destruction of his hopes.

'Effie,' said Mr. Feilding, 'I have talked with your brother. He has read some of the play to me——'

'And you think?' she asked him eagerly.

He shook his head mournfully. 'The boy has much to learn—very much. Meantime, the play itself is worthless—quite worthless.'

'Oh! Poor boy! And he has built so much upon it.'

'Yes—they all do at the outset. Mind, Effie, he is a clever boy: he will do. Meantime, he must study.'

'Oh! Poor Archie! Poor boy!'

'It seems hard, doesn't it, not to succeed all at once? Yet Browning and Tennyson and Thackeray were all well on for forty before they succeeded. Why should he

despair? Meantime I have made him a little offer.'

'Oh! Mr. Feilding, you are always so good.'

'I have offered to give him fifty pounds—down—and to take this rough unlicked thing he calls a Play. If I find time I shall, perhaps, rewrite the whole, and put it on the stage. It will then, of course, be my own—my own, Effie. Good-bye, child. I have not forgotten our talk—or my promise—if we remain on friendly relations.'

He went away. Effie sank into a chair. What she had done with her own work had never seemed to her half so terrible as what was now proposed to be done with her brother's work.

She crept into his room. He sat with his head in his hands, most mournful of bards since the world began.

'Archie, I know—I know; he has told me. Oh! Archie—do you think it is true?'

'He says so, Effie. He says it is worthless.'

‘Yet he will give you fifty pounds.’

‘That is to please you—for your sake. The thing is worthless—no manager would look at it.’

‘Yet—fifty pounds! Why should Mr. Feilding give fifty pounds—a whole fifty pounds—for a worthless play? Archie, don’t do it—don’t let him have it; wait a little—we will ask somebody else. Oh! I could tell you something. Wait—tell him, if you must say anything, that you will think it over.’

When Effie turned over the pages of the next number of *The Muses Nine* she found, first of all, her own verses in the Editor’s column with his name at the bottom. This sight, which had formerly made her so proud, now filled her with shame. The generous promise of the future failed to awaken in her any glow of hope. For the very words with which her only editor had beguiled her of her verses—the plea that they were worthless, and must be rewritten—he had used to her brother. And as her poems had never been rewritten, so would Archie’s play, she felt



sure, be presented without a single alteration, with the name of Mr. Alec Feilding as author. That week she took no verses to the studio-study.

And a certain paragraph in the same columns perused by this suspicious young woman brought rage—nothing short of rage—into her heart. No! not her brother, as well as herself! It ran thus: ‘I have always been under the impression that the dearth of good plays is due to nothing else in the world than the fact that the good men who ought to be writing them all run off into the domain of fiction. It is a pleasant country—that of Fable Land. I have been there, and I hope to go there again and make a long stay. But Play Land—that is also a pleasant country. I have been there lately, and I hope to demonstrate that a good play may still be produced in the English tongue—a good and original play. In short, I have written a romantic drama, of which all I can say at present is that it lies finished, in my fireproof safe, and that a certain actor-manager will

probably play the title-rôle before many moons have waxed and waned.'

'No,' said Effie, crumpling up the paper.  
'You have not got Archie's romantic drama yet.'

## CHAPTER VIII

## ALL ABOUT MYSELF

‘You have kept this promise, then.’ Armored welcomed her old friend with eyes of kindness and lips of smiles. ‘Do you ever think of the promise that you broke? Effie, dear—this young lady was the only other occupant of the room—this is Mr. Roland Lee—my first friend and my first master. He knew me long ago, in Samson, in the days of which I have told you. We have memories of our own—memories such as make the old friendships impossible to be dissolved—whatever happens. Roland, you first put a pencil into my hand and taught me how to use it. In return, I used to play old-fashioned tunes in the evening. And you first put thoughts into my head. Before you came my head was

filled with phantoms, which had neither voice nor shape. What am I to do now in return for such a gift?' She gave him both her hands, and her face was so glowing, her eyes so soft yet serious withal, her voice so full of tenderness—that the luckless painter stood confused and overwhelmed. How had he deserved such a reception?

'This evening,' she went on, 'we are going to talk about nobody but myself, and about nothing but my own affairs. Effie, you will be horribly bored. It is five years since I had such a chance. Because, my dear, though you have the best will in the world, and would talk to me about old times if you could, you did not know me when I lived on Samson in the Scilly Islands—and Roland did. That is, if he still remembers Samson.'

'I remember every day on Samson: every blade of grass on the island: every boulder and every crag.'

'And every talk we had in those days?—all the things you told me?'

‘I remember, as well, a girl who has so changed, so grown——’

‘So much the better. Then we can talk just as we used to do. I thought you would somehow remember the girl, Roland.’ She looked up again, smiling. Then she hesitated, and went on slowly: ‘Yet I was afraid, this morning, that you might have forgotten one of the two who wandered about the island together.’

‘I could never forget you, Armorel.’

‘I meant—the other—Roland.’

He made no reply. In his evening dress—which was full of creases, as if it had not been put on for a very long time—he looked a little less forlorn than in the shabby old brown-velvet jacket; he had brushed his hair—nay, he had even had it cut and trimmed: but there still hung about him the look of waste: his eyes were melancholy: his bearing was dejected: he spoke with hesitation: he was even shy, like a schoolboy. Effie noted these things, and wondered. And she observed, besides, not only that his coat was

creased, but that his shirt was frayed at the cuffs and torn in the front. In fact, the young man, in dropping out of society, had, as a natural consequence, neglected his wardrobe and allowed his linen to run to seed unrebuked. Every man who has been a bachelor—most of us have—remembers how shirts behave when the eye of the master is once taken off them.

He was shy because the atmosphere of the drawing-room, so dainty, so luxurious, so womanly, was strange to him. Three years and more had passed since he had been in such a room. He was also shy because this splendid creature, this girl dressed in silk and lovely lace, this miracle of girls, called herself Armorel, his once simple rustic maid of Samson Isle. Further, he was ashamed because this girl remembered him as he was in the good old days, when his face was turned to the summit of the mountain and his feet were on the upward slope.

Armorel had placed on the table a portfolio full of drawings.

‘Now for myself,’ she said, gaily. ‘Roland, you are an artist. You must look at my drawings. Here are the best I have done. I have had many masters since you, but none that taught me so much in so short a time. Do you remember when you first found out that I could hold a pencil? You were very patient then. Master. Be lenient now.’

‘I had a very apt pupil,’ he began, turning over the drawings. ‘These need no leniency. These are very good indeed. You have had other and better masters.’

‘I have had other masters, it is true. I have done my best, Roland—to grow.’

He dropped his eyes. But he continued to turn over the sketches. The drawings showed, at least, that natural aptitude which may be genius and may be that imitation of genius which is difficult to distinguish from the real gift. Many painters with no more natural aptitude than Armored have risen to be Royal Academicians.

‘But these are very good indeed,’ Roland repeated, with emphasis. ‘You have, indeed,

worked well, and you have the true feeling.'

'Do you remember, Roland, that day when we talked about the Perfect Woman? No, I see by your eyes that you have forgotten. But I remember. I will not tell you all. One thing she had done: she had trained her eye and her hand. She knew what was good in Art, and was not carried away by any follies or fashions. I did not understand then what you meant by follies and fashions. But I am wiser now. I have been training eye and hand. I think I know a good picture, or a good statue, or a good work in any Art. Do not think me conceited, Master. I have been obedient to your instructions—that is all.'

'You have the soul of an artist, Armorel,' said her Master. 'But yet—I fear—I think—you have missed the supreme gift. You are not a great artist.'

'No, I can grow no higher in painting. I have learned my own limitations. If it is only to understand and to worship the Great



Masters it is worth while to get so far. Are you satisfied with your pupil?’

For a moment the old look came back to Roland's eyes. ‘You are the best of pupils,’ he said. ‘But I might have expected so much. Tell me how you succeeded in getting away from Samson?’

She told him, briefly, how the Ancient Lady died, how she found the family treasure, and how she had resolved to go away and learn: how she found masters and guardians: how she lived in Florence, Dresden, Paris: how she worked unceasingly. ‘I remembered, always, Roland, your picture of the Perfect Woman.’

‘Could I—I—have told you things that have made you—what you are?’ It seemed as if another man had given the girl this excellent advice. Not himself—quite another man.

‘Effie, dear,’ Armorel turned to her, ‘you do not understand. I must tell you. Five years ago, when I lived on Samson, a girl so ignorant that it makes me tremble to think

what might have happened—there came to the island a young gentleman who was so kind as to take this ignorant girl—me—in hand, and to fill her empty head with all kinds of great and noble thoughts. He was an artist by profession. Oh! an artist filled with ardour and with ambition. He would be satisfied with nothing short of the best: he taught me that none of us ought to be satisfied till we have attained our full stature, and grown as tall as we possibly can. It made that ignorant girl's heart glow only to hear him talk, because she had never heard such talk before. Then he left her, and came back no more. But presently the chance came to this girl, as you have heard, and she was able to leave the island and go where she could find masters and teachers. It is five years ago. And always, every day, Roland'—her lip quivered—'I have said to myself, "My first master is growing taller—taller—taller—every day—I must grow as tall as I can, or else when I meet him again I shall be too insignificant for him to notice." Always I have

thought how I should meet him again. So tall, so great, so wonderful !’

Ellie remarked that while Armored addressed Roland she did not look at him until the last words, when she turned and faced him with eyes running over. The man’s head dropped : his fingers played with the drawings : he made no reply.

‘ In the evening,’ Armored went on, ‘ we used to have music. I played only the old-fashioned tunes then that Justinian Tryeth taught me—do you remember the tunes, Roland? I will play one for you again.’ She took a violin out of the case and began to tune the strings. ‘ This is my old fiddle. It has been Justinian’s—and his father’s before him. I have had other instruments since then, but I love the old fiddle best.’ She drew her bow across the strings. ‘ I can play much better now, Roland. And I have much better music ; but I will play only the old tunes, because I want you to remember quite clearly those two who walked and talked and sailed together. It is

so easy for you to forget that young man. But I remember him very well indeed.' She drew the bow across the strings again. 'Now we are in the old room, while the old people are sitting round the fire. Effie, dear, put the shade over the lamp and turn it low—so—now we are all sitting in the firelight, just as it used to be on Samson—see the red light dancing about the walls. It fills your eyes and makes them glow, Roland. Oh! we are back again. What are you thinking of, artist, while the music falls upon your ears?—while I play—what shall I play? "Dissembling Love," which others call "The Lost Heart"? ' She played it with the old spirit, but far more than the old delicacy and feeling. 'You remember that, Roland? Do you hear the lapping of the waves in Porth Bay and the breakers over Shark Point? Or is it too rustic a ditty. I will play you something better, but still the old tunes.' She played first 'Prince Rupert's March,' and then 'The Saraband'—great and lofty airs to one who can play them greatly. While she

played Effie watched. In Armorel's eyes she read a purpose. This was no mere play. The man she called her master listened, sitting at the table, the sketches spread out before him, ill at ease, and as one in a troubled dream.

‘Do you see him again, that young man?’ Armorel asked. ‘It makes one happy only to think of such a young man. He knew the dangers before him. “The Way of Wealth,” he said once, “and the Way of Pleasure draw men as if with ropes.” But he was so strong and steadfast. Nothing would turn him from his way. Not Pleasure, not Wealth, not anything mean or low. There was never any young man so noble. Oh! Do you remember him, Roland? Tell me—tell me—do you remember him?’

Over the pictures on the table he bowed his head. But he made no reply. Then Effie, watching the glittering tears in Armorel's eyes and the bowed head of the man, stole softly out of the room and closed the door.

Armored put down her fiddle. She drew nearer to the man. His head sank lower. She stood over him, tall and queenly, as the Muse stood over Alfred de Musset. She laid her hand upon his shoulder.

‘That old spirit is not dead, but sleeping, Roland. You have not driven it forth. It is your own still. You have only silenced its voice for a while. You think that you have killed it; but you remember it still. Thank God! it has been only sleeping. If it were dead you would not remember. Let it wake again. Oh! Roland—let it wake again—again. Oh! Roland—Roland—my friend and Master ——’ She could say no more.

The man raised his head. It is a shameful and a terrible thing to see the face of a man who is disgraced and conscious of his shame. Perhaps it is worse to see the face of a man who is disgraced and is unconscious of his shame. He looked round, and saw the tears in the girl’s eyes and the quivering of her lips.

‘The man you remember,’ he said hoarsely, ‘is dead and buried. He died

three years ago and more. Another man—a poor and mean creature—walks about in his shape. He is unworthy to be in your presence. Suffer him to go, and think of him no longer.’

‘Not another man, because you remember the former. Roland, come back, my old friend ; come back !’

‘It is too late.’ But he wavered.

‘It is never too late. Oh ! I wonder—was it the Way of Pleasure or was it the Way of Wealth ?’

‘Do I look,’ he asked bitterly, ‘as if it was the Way of Pleasure ?’

‘It is not too late, Roland. You have sinned against yourself. If it were too late you would be happy after the kind of those who can live in sin and be happy. Since you are not happy, it is not too late. The doors of heaven stand open night and day for all.’

‘You talk the old language, Armorer.’

‘It is the language of my soul. I will say the same thing in any tongue you please, so that you understand me.’

‘To go back—to begin all over again—to go on as if the last three years had never been ——’

‘Yes—yes—as if they had never been! That is best. As if they had never been.’

‘Armored, do you know,’ he asked her quickly—‘do you know the thing—the Awful Thing—that I have done?’

‘Do not tell me. Never tell me.’

‘Some day, I think I must. What shall I say, now?’

‘Say that your footsteps are turned in the old way, Roland.’

He pushed back the chair and stood up. Now, if they had been measured, he would have proved four inches and a half taller than the girl, for he was half an inch short of six feet, and she was exactly five feet seven. Yet as they stood face to face, it seemed to him—and to her as well—as if she towered over him by as many inches as separate the tallest woman from the smallest man. Nature thus accommodates herself to the mental condition of the moment.



The small man, however, did a very strange thing. He drew forth a pocket-book and took from it what Armorel perceived to be a cheque. This he deliberately tore across twice, and threw the fragments into the fire.

‘You do not understand this act, Armorel. It is the turning of the footstep.’

She took his hand and pressed it. ‘I pray,’ she said, ‘that the way may prove less thorny than you think!’

Nature, again accommodating herself, caused the small, mean man to grow suddenly several inches. There was still a goodly difference between the two, but it was lessened. More than that, the man continued to grow; and his face was brighter, and his eyes less haggard.

‘I will go now, Armorel,’ he said.

‘You will come again—soon?’

‘Not yet. I will come again, when the shame of the present belongs to the past.’

‘No. You shall come often. But of past or present we will speak no more. Tell me, in your own good time, Roland, how you fare.

But do not desert your old pupil. Come to see me often.'

He bowed his head and went away.

'Effie,' said Armorel presently, 'I cannot tell you what all this means.'

'It means a man who has fallen,' said the girl, wise with poetic instinct. 'Anyone could see failure and shame written on his face. It ought to be a noble face, but something has gone out of it. You knew him long ago—when he was different—and you tried to bring him to his old self. Oh! Armorel—you are wonderful—you were his better spirit—you were his muse—calling him back.'

She laid her hand in Armorel's. They stood together in silence. Then Armorel spoke.

'I feared it was quite another man—a new man—a stranger that I had found. But it was not. It was the same man after all.'

Effie stooped and picked up a fragment of paper lying on the hearth. 'Mr. Feilding's signature,' she said, unthinking. At times,

when one is moved, trifles sometimes seem to acquire importance.

‘That? It is part of a cheque which he tore up. Effie, dear—it was good of you to go away and leave us when you did. Perhaps he would not have spoken so freely if you had been here. Oh! he is the same man, after all. He has come back to me. Effie, tell me: but you know no more than I. If you once loved a man, and if you suffered the thought of him to lie in your heart for years, and if you filled him with all the virtues that there are, and if he grew in your heart to be a knight perfect at all points——’

‘Well, Armored?’ For she stopped, and Effie took her hand.

‘Oh, Effie!’ she replied, with glowing cheeks, ‘could you ever afterwards love another man? Could you ever cease to love that man of your imagination? Could any meaner man content you? For my part—never!—never!—never!’

## CHAPTER IX

## TO MAKE HIM HAPPY

‘SHALL we discuss Mr. Feilding any longer?’ Armorel asked, with a little impatience. ‘It really seems as if we had nothing to talk about but the perfections of this incomparable person.’ It was in the evening. Armorel had discovered, already, that the evenings spent at home in the society of her companion were both long and dull; that they had nothing to talk about; that Zoe regarded every single subject from a point of view which was not her own; and that both in conversation and in personal intercourse she was having a great deal more than she desired of Mr. Alec Feilding. Therefore, she was naturally a little impatient. One cannot every evening go and sit alone in the study:

one cannot play the violin all the evening : and one cannot reduce a companion to absolute silence.

Zoe, who had been talking into the fire from her cushions, turned her fluffly head, opened her blue eyes wide, and looked, not reproachfully but sorrowfully and with wonder, at a girl who could hear too much about Alec Feilding.

‘ Let me talk—just a little—sometimes—of my best friend, Armorel, dear. If you only knew what Alec has been to me and to my lost lover—my Jerome ! ’

‘ Forgive me, Zoe. Go on talking about him.’

‘ How quiet and cosy,’ she murmured, in reply, ‘ this room is in the evening ! It makes one feel virtuous only to think of the cold wind and the cold people outside. This heaven is surely a reward for the righteous. It is enough only to lie in the warmth without talking. But the time and the place invite confidences. Armorel, I am going to repose a great confidence in you—a secret

plan of my own. And you are so very, very sympathetic when you please, dear child—especially when Effie is here—I wonder if she is worth it?—that you might spare me a little of your sympathy.’

‘My dear Zoe’—Armored felt a touch of remorse—she had been unsympathetic—‘you shall have all there is to spare. But what kind of sympathy do you want? You were talking of Mr. Feilding—not of yourself.’

‘Yes—and that is of myself in a way. I know you will not misunderstand me, dear. You will not imagine that I am—well, in love with Alec, when I confess to you that I think a very great deal about him.’

‘I never thought so, at all,’ said Armored.

Zoe’s eyes opened for a moment and gleamed. It was a doubtful saying. Why should not she be in love with Alec, or Alec with her? But Armored knew nothing about love.

‘When a woman has loved once, dear,’ she murmured, ‘her heart is gone. My love-

passages,' she put her handkerchief to her eyes—to some women the drawing-room is the stage—my love-story, dear, is finished and done. My heart is in the grave with Jerome. But this you cannot understand. I think so much of Alec—first, because he has been all goodness to me; and, next, because he is so wonderfully clever.'

'Talk about him, Zoe, as long as you please.'

'If he had been an ordinary man,' she went on, 'I should have been equally grateful. I suppose. But there it would have ended. To be under a debt of gratitude to such a man as Alec makes one long to do something in return. And, besides, there are so very, very few good men in the world that it does one good only to talk about them.'

'I suppose that Mr. Feilding is really a man of great genius,' said Armorer. 'I confess he seems to me rather ponderous in his talk—may I say, dull? From genius one expects the unexpected.'

‘Dull? Oh, no! A little constrained in his manner. That comes from his excessive sensibility. But dull?—oh, no!’

‘He seemed dull at the theatre last night.’

‘It was a curious coincidence meeting him there, was it not?’

‘I thought you must have told him that you were going.’

‘No, no; quite a coincidence. And he so seldom goes to a theatre. The badness of the acting, he says, irritates his nerves to such a degree that it sometimes spoils his work for a week. And yet he is actually going to bring out a play himself. There is a paragraph in the paper about it—his own paper. Give it to me, dear; it is on the sofa. Thank you.’ She read the paragraph, which we already know. ‘What do you think of that, Armorel?’

‘Isn’t it rather arrogant—about good men turning out good work?’

‘My dear, genius can afford to be arrogant. True genius is always impatient of small people and of stupidities. It suffers its



contempt to be seen, and that makes the stupidities cry out about arrogance. Even the most stupid can cry out, you see. But think. He is going to add a new wreath to his brow. He is already known as a poet, a novelist, a painter, an essayist, and now he is to become a dramatist. He really is the cleverest man in the whole world.'

Armored expressed none of the admiration that was expected. She was wondering whether, if Mr. Feilding had not been quite so clever, he might not have been quite so heavy and didactic in conversation. Less clever people, perhaps, are more prodigal of their cleverness, and give away some of it in conversation. Perhaps the very clever want it all for their books.

'I said I would give you his poems,' Zoe continued. 'I bought the book for you—the second series, which is better than the first. It is on the piano, dear; that little parcel, thank you.' She opened the parcel and disclosed a dainty little volume in white and gold. It was illustrated by a small etching

of the poet's head for a frontispiece. It was printed in beautiful new type on thick paper—the kind called handmade—the edges left ragged. There were about a hundred and twenty pages, and on every two pages there was a single poem. These were not arranged in any order or sequence of thought. They were all separate. The poet showed knowledge of contemporary manners in serving up so small a dish of verse. Fifty or sixty short poems is quite as much as the reader of poetry will stand in these days.

Armored turned over the pages and began to read them. Strange! How could a man so ponderous, so pompous in his conceit, so dogmatic, so self-conscious, write such pretty, easy-flowing numbers? The metres fitted the subject; the rhymes were apt, the cadence true, the verses tripped light and graceful like a maiden dancing.

‘How could such a man,’ she cried, ‘get a touch so light? It is truly wonderful.’

‘I told you so, dear. He is altogether wonderful.’

She went on reading. Presently she cried out, 'Why! he writes like a woman. Only a woman could have written these lines.' She read them out. 'It is a woman's hand, and a woman's way of thinking.'

'That shows his genius. No one except Alec—or a woman—could have said just that thing in just that manner.'

Armorel closed the volume. 'I think,' she said, 'that I like a man to write like a man and a woman like a woman.'

'Then,' said Zoe, 'how is a novelist to make a woman talk?'

'He makes his women talk like women if he can. But when he speaks himself it must be with the voice of a man. In these poems it is the poet who speaks, not any character, man or woman.'

'You will like the poems better as you read them. They will grow upon you. And you will find the poet himself—not a woman, but a man—in his verses. It helps one so much to understand the verses when you know the poet. I think I could almost

understand Browning if I had ever known him. Think of Alec when you read his verses.'

'Yes,' said Armorel, still without enthusiasm.

'You said we were talking about nothing else, dear,' Zoe went on. 'I talk so much of him because I respect and revere him so much. I have known Alec a long time'—she lay back with her head turned from her companion, talking softly into the fire, as if she was communing with herself. 'He is, though you do not understand it yet, a man of the most highly strung and sensitive nature. The true reason why he talks ponderously—as you call it, Armorel—is that he is conscious of the traps into which this very sensitiveness of his may lead him: for instance, he may say, before persons unworthy of his confidence, things which they would most likely misunderstand. It is simply wicked to cast pearls before swine. A poet, more than any other man, must be quite sure of his audience before he gives himself away.'

I assure you, when Alec feels himself alone with his intimates—a very little circle—his talk is brilliant.’

‘We are unlucky, then,’ said Armorel, still without enthusiasm.

‘Another thing may make him seem dull. He is always preoccupied, always thinking about his work: his mind is overcharged.’

‘I thought he was always in society—a great diner-out?’

‘He is. Society brings him relief. The inanities of social intercourse rest his brain. Without this rest he would be ~~crushed~~.’

‘I see,’ said Armorel, coldly.

‘Then there is that other side of him—of which you know nothing. My dear, he is constantly thinking of others. His private life—but I must not tell too much. Not only the cleverest man in London, but the best.’

Armorel felt guilty. She had not, hitherto, looked upon this phoenix with the reverence which was due to so great a creature. Nay, she did not like him. She was repelled rather than attracted by him. She liked him

less every time she met him. And this was oftener than she desired. Somehow or other, they were always meeting. On some pretext or other he was always calling. And certainly for the last few days Zoe was unable to talk about anything else. The genius, the greatness of this man seemed to overwhelm her.

‘And now, my dear,’ she went on, still talking about him, ‘for my little confidences. I have a great scheme in my head. Oh! a very great scheme indeed.’ She turned round and sat up, looking Armorel full in the face. Her eyes under her fluffy hair were large and luminous, when she lifted them. Oftener, they were large but sleepy eyes. Now they were quite bright. She was wideawake and she was in earnest. ‘I have spoken to no one but you about it as yet. Perhaps you and I can manage it all by ourselves.’

‘What is it?’

‘You and I, dear, you and I, we two—we can be so associated and bound up in the life of the poet-painter as to be for ever joined

with his name. Petrarch and Laura are not more closely connected than we may be with Alec Feilding, if you only join with me.'

'First tell me what it is—this plan of yours.'

'It is nothing less than just to relieve him, once for all, from his business cares.'

'Has he business cares?'

'They take up his precious time. They weigh upon his mind. Why should such a man have any business at all to look after?'

'Well, but,' said Armorel, refusing to rise to this tempting bait, 'why does such a man allow himself to have business cares, if they worry him?'

'It is the conduct of his journal, my dear.'

'But other authors and painters do not conduct journals. Why should he? I believe that successful writers and artists make very large incomes. If he is so successful, why does he trouble about managing a paper? That is certainly work that can be done by a man of inferior brain.'

'You are so matter-of-fact, dear. The

paper is his own, and he thinks, I suppose, that nobody but himself could edit the thing. Leave poor Alec one or two human weaknesses. He may think this, and yet make no allowance for his own shrinking and sensitive nature.'

Certainly Armorel had seen no indications in this poet-painter of the shrinking nature. It was very carefully concealed.

'Of course,' Zoe continued, 'you hardly know him. But his genius you do know. And the business worries that are inseparable from a journal are a serious hindrance to his higher work. Believe me, dear, even if you do not understand why it should be so.'

'I can very well believe it—I only ask why Mr. Feilding alone, among authors and painters, should hamper himself with such worries.'

'Well, dear—there they are. And I have formed a plan—Oh!'—she clasped her hands and opened her eyes wide—'such a plan! The best and the cleverest plan in the world



for the best and the cleverest man in the world! But I want your help.'

'What can I do?'

'I will tell you. First of all. You must remember that Alec is the sole proprietor, as well as the editor of this journal—*The Muses Nine*. It is his property. He created it. But the business management of the paper worries him. My plan, Armored—my plan'—she spoke and looked most impressive—'will relieve him altogether of the work.'

'Yes—and how do I come into your plan?'

'This way. I have found out, through a person of business, that if he would sell a share—say a quarter, or an eighth—of his paper he would be able to put the business part of it into paid hands—the people who do nothing else. Now, Armored, we will buy that share—you and I between us will buy it. You shall advance the whole of the money, and I will pay you back half. The price will be nothing to you. That is, it will be a great deal, because the investment will be

such a splendid thing, and the returns will be so brilliant. You will increase your income enormously, and you will have the satisfaction'—she paused, because, though she was herself more animated, earnest, and eloquent with voice and eyes, and though she threw so much persuasion into her manner, the tell-tale face of the girl showed no kindling light of response at all—'the satisfaction,' she continued, 'of feeling that such a help to Literature and Art will make us both immortal.'

Armored made no reply. She was considering the proposition coldly, and it was one of those things which must be considered without enthusiasm.

'As for money,' Zoe continued, with one more attempt to awaken a responsive fire, 'I have found out what will be wanted. For three thousand five hundred pounds we can get this share in the paper. Only three thousand five hundred pounds! That is no more than one thousand seven hundred and fifty pounds apiece! I shall insist upon

having my share in the investment, because I should grudge you the whole of the work. As for the returns, I have been well advised of that. Of course, Alec is beyond all paltry desire for gain, and he might ask a great deal more. But he leaves everything to his advisers—and oh! my dear, he must on no account know—yet—who is doing this for him. Afterwards, we will break it to him gradually, perhaps, when he has quite recovered from the worries and is rested. If we think of returns, ten, twenty, even fifty per cent. may be expected as the paper gets on. Think of fifty per cent.!’

‘No,’ said Armorel. ‘Let us, too, be above paltry desire for gain. Let those who do want more money go in for this business. If your advice is correct, Mr. Feilding can have no difficulty at all in selling a share of the paper. People who want more money will be only too eager to buy it.’

‘My dear child, everybody wants more money.’

‘I have quite enough. But why do you

ask me to join you, Zoe? I do not know Mr. Feilding, except as an acquaintance. He is, I dare say, all that you think. But I do not find him personally interesting. And there is no reason why I should pretend to be one of the train who follow him and admire him.'

'But I want you—I want you, Armorel.' Zoe clasped her hands and lifted her eyes, humid now. But a woman's eyes move a girl less than a man. 'I want you, and none but you, to join me in this. We two alone will do it. It will be such a splendid thing to do! Nothing short of the rescue of the finest and most poetic mind of the day from sordid cares and worries. Think of what future ages will say of you!'

Armorel laughed. 'Indeed!' she said. 'This kind of immortality does not tempt me very much. But, Zoe, it is really useless to urge me. I could not do this, if I would. And truly I would not if I could; for I made a promise to Mr. Jagenal, when I came of age the other day, that I would not lend or

part with any money without taking his advice ; and that I would not change any of his investments without consulting him. I seem to know, beforehand, what he would say if I consulted him about this proposal.'

'Then, my dear,' said Zoe, lying back in her cushions and turning her face to the fire, 'let us talk about the matter no more.'

She had failed. From the outset she felt that she was going to fail. The man had had every chance. He had met the girl constantly : she had left him alone with her : but he had not attracted her in the least. Well : she confessed, in spite of his cleverness, Alec had somewhat of a wooden manner : he was too authoritative ; and Armored was too independent. She had failed.

Armored, for her part, remembered how her lawyer had warned her on the day when she became twenty-one and of age to manage her own affairs : all kinds of traps, he told her, are set to catch women who have got money in order to rob them of their money :

they are besieged on every side, especially on the sides presumably the weakest : she must put on the armour of suspicion : she must never—never—never—here he held up a terrifying forefinger—enter into any engagement or promise, verbal or in writing, without consulting him. The memory of this warning made her uneasy—because it was her own companion, the lady appointed by her lawyer himself, who had made the first attempt upon her money. True, the attempt was entirely disinterested. There would be no gain to Zoe even if she were to accede : the proposal was prompted by the purest friendship. And yet she felt uneasy.

As for the disinterested companion, she wrote a letter that very night. She said : ‘I have made an attempt to get this money for you. It has failed. It was hopeless from the first. You have had your chance : you have been with the girl often enough to attract and interest her : yet she is neither attracted nor interested. I have given her your poems : she says they ought to be the

work of a woman : she likes the verse, but she cares nothing about the poet. Strange ! For my own part, I have been foolish enough to love the man, and to care not one brass farthing about his work. Your poems—your pictures—they all seem to me outside yourself, and not a part of you at all. Why it is so I cannot explain. Well, Alec, you planted me here, and I remain till you tell me I may go. It is not very lively : the girl and I have nothing in common : but it is restful and cosy, and I always did like comfort and warmth. And Armored pays all the bills. What next, however ? Is there any other way ? What are my lord's commands ?'

## CHAPTER X

## THE SECRET OF THE TWO PICTURES.

A GOOD many things troubled Armorel—the companion with whom she could not talk: her persistent praises of Mr. Feilding: the constant attendance of that illustrious genius—and she wanted advice. Generally, she was a self-reliant person, but these were new experiences. Effie, she knew, could not advise her. She might go to Mr. Jagenal; but, then, elderly lawyers are not always ready to receive confidences from young ladies. Then she thought of her cousin Philippa, whom she had not seen since that first evening. Philippa looked trustworthy and judicious. She went to see her in the morning, when she would be alone. Philippa received her with the greatest friendliness.



‘If you really would like a talk about everything,’ she said, ‘come to my own room.’ She led the way. ‘Here we shall be quiet and undisturbed. It is the place where I practise every day. But I shall never be able to play like you, dear. Now, take that chair and let us begin. First, why do you come so seldom?’

‘Frankly and truly, do you wish me to come often?’

‘Frankly and truly, fair cousin, yes. But come alone. Mrs. Elstree and I were at school together, and we were not friends. That is all. I hope you like her for a companion.’

‘The first of my difficulties,’ said Armored, ‘is that I do not. I imagined when she came that it mattered nothing about her. You see, I have been for five years under masters and teachers, and I never thought anything about them outside the lesson. I thought my companion would be only another master. But she isn’t. I have her company at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. And all the evening. I think I am wrong not to like her, because she

is always good-tempered. Somehow, she jars upon me. She likes everything I do not care about—comic operas, dance music, French novels. She has no feeling for pictures, and her taste in literature is . . . not mine. Oh, I am talking scandal. And she is so perfectly inoffensive. Mostly she lies by the fire and either dozes or reads her French novels. All day long, I go about my devices. But there is the evening.'

'This is rather unfortunate, Armorel, is it not?'

'If it were only for a month or two, one would not mind. Tell me, Philippa, how long must I have a companion?'

Philippa laughed. 'I dare say the question may solve itself before long. Women generally achieve independence—with the wedding ring—unless that brings worse slavery.'

'No,' said Armorel, gravely, 'I shall not achieve independence that way.'

'Not that way?'

'Not by marrying!'

‘Why not, Armorel?’

‘You will not laugh at me, Philippa? I learned a long time ago that I could only marry one kind of man. And now I cannot find him.’

‘You did know such a man formerly? My dear, you are not going to let a childish passion ruin your own life.’

‘I knew a man who was, in my mind, this kind of man. He came across my life for two or three weeks. When he went away I kept his image in my mind, and it gradually grew as I grew—always larger and more beautiful. The more I learned—the more splendid grew this image. It was an Idol that I set up and worshipped for five long years.’

‘And now your Idol is shattered?’

‘No; the Idol remains. It is the man, who no longer corresponds to the Idol. The man who might have become this wonderful Image is gone—and I can never love any other man. He must be my Idol in the body.’

‘But, Armorel, this is unreal. We are

not angels. Men and women must take each other with their imperfections.'

'My Idol may have had his imperfections, too. Well, the man has gone. I am punished, perhaps, for setting up an Idol.'

She was silent for awhile, and Philippa had nothing to say.

'But about my companion?' Armorel went on. 'When can I do without one?'

'There is nothing but opinion to consider. Opinion says that a young lady must not live alone.'

'If one never hears what opinion says, one need not consider opinion perhaps.'

'Well, but you could not go into society alone.'

'That matters nothing, because I never go into society at all.'

'Never go into society at all? What do you mean?'

'I mean that we go nowhere.'

'Well, what are people about? They call upon you, I suppose?'

'No; nobody ever calls.'

‘But where are Mrs. Elstree’s friends?’

‘She has no friends.’

‘Oh! She has—or had—an immense circle of friends.’

‘That was before her father lost everything and killed himself. They were fair-weather friends.’

‘Yes, but one’s own people don’t run away because of misfortune.’ Philippa looked dissatisfied with the explanation. ‘My dear cousin, this must be inquired into. Your lawyer told me that Mrs. Elstree’s large circle of friends would be of such service to you. Do you really mean that you go nowhere? And your wonderful playing absolutely wasted? And your face seen nowhere? Oh! It is intolerable that such a girl as you should be so neglected.’

‘I have other friends. There is Effie Wilnot and her brother who wants to become a dramatist. And I have found an old friend, an artist. I am not at all lonely. But in the evening, I confess, it is dull. I am not

afraid of being alone. I have always been alone. But now I am not alone. I have to talk.'

'And uncongenial talk.'

'Now advise me, Philippa. Her talk is always on one subject—always the wonderful virtues of Mr. Feilding.'

'My cousin Alec? Yes'—Philippa changed colour, and shaded her face with a hand-screen. 'I believe she knows him.'

'Your cousin? Oh! I had forgotten. But it is all the better because you know him. Philippa, I am troubled about him. For not only does Zoe talk about him perpetually, but he is always calling on one pretext or other. If I go to a picture-gallery, he is there: if I walk in the park, I meet him: if I go to church—Zoe does not go—he meets me in the porch: if we go to the theatre, he is there.'

'I did not think that Alec was that kind of man,' said Philippa, still keeping the hand-screen before her face. 'Are you mistaken, perhaps? Has he said anything?'

‘No: he has said nothing. But it annoys me to have this man following me about—and—and—Philippa—he is your cousin—I know—but I detest him.’

‘Can you not show that you dislike his attentions? If he will not understand that you dislike him—wait—perhaps he will speak—though I hardly think—you may be mistaken, dear. If he speaks, let your answer be quite unmistakable.’

‘Then I hope that he will speak to-morrow. Zoe wanted me to find some money in order to help him in some way—out of some worries.’

‘My dear child—I implore you—do not be drawn into any money entanglements. What does Zoe mean? What does it all mean? My dear, there is something here that I cannot understand. What can it mean? Zoe to help my cousin out of worries about money? Zoe? What has Zoe to do with him and his worries?’

‘He has been very kind to her and to her husband’

‘There is something we do not understand,’ Philippa repeated.

‘You are not angry with me for not liking your cousin?’

‘Angry? No, indeed. He has been so spoiled with his success that I don’t wonder at your not liking him. As for me, you know, it is different. I knew Alec before his greatness became visible. No one, in the old days, ever suspected the wonderful powers he has developed. When he was a boy, no one knew that he could even hold a pencil, nobody suspected him of making rhymes—and now see what he has done. Yet, after all, his achievements seem to me only like incongruous additions stuck on to a central house. Alec and painting don’t go together, in my mind. Nor Alec and *vers de société*. Nor Alec and story-telling. In his youth he passed for a practical lad, full of common-sense and without imagination.’

‘Was he of a sensitive, highly nervous temperament?’

Not to my knowledge. He has been



always, and is still, I think, a man of a singularly calm and even cold temper—not in the least nervous nor particularly sensitive.’

Armored compared this estimate with that of her companion. Strange that two persons should disagree so widely in their estimate of a man.

‘Then, three or four years ago, he suddenly blossomed out into a painter. He invited his friends to his chambers. He told us that he had a little surprise for us. And then he drew aside a curtain and disclosed the first picture he thought worthy of exhibition. It hangs on the wall above your head, Armored, with its companion of the following year. My father bought them and gave them to me.’

Armored got up to look at them.

‘Oh!’ she cried. ‘These are copies!’

‘Copies? No. They are Alec’s own original pictures. What makes you think they are copies?’

What made her think that they were

copies was the very remarkable fact that both pictures represented scenes among the Scilly Isles : that in each of them was represented—herself—as a girl of fifteen or sixteen : that the sketches for both these pictures had been made in her own presence by the artist : that he was none other than Roland Lee : and that the picture she had seen in his studio was done by the same hand and in the same style as the two pictures before her. Of that she had no doubt. She had so trained her eye and hand that there could be no doubt at all of that fact.

She stared, bewildered. Philippa, who was beside her looking at the pictures, went on talking without observing the sheer amazement in Armorel's eyes.

‘That was his first picture,’ she continued ; ‘and this was the second. I remember very well the little speech he made while we were all crowding round the picture. “I am going,” he said, “to make a new departure. You all thought I was just following the beaten road at the Bar. Well, I am trying a

new and a shorter way to success. You see my first effort." It was difficult to believe our eyes. Alec a painter? One might as well have expected to find Alec a poet: and in a few months he was a poet: and then a story-teller. And his poetry is as good as it is made in these days; and his short stories are as good as any of those by the French writers.'

'What is the subject of this picture?' Armorel asked with an effort.

'The place is somewhere on the Cornish coast, I believe. He always paints the same kind of picture—always a rocky coast—a tossing sea—perhaps a boat—spray flying over the rocks—and always a girl, the same girl. There she is in both pictures—a handsome black-haired girl, quite young—it might be almost a portrait of yourself when you were younger, Armorel.'

'Almost,' said Armorel.

'This girl is now as well known to Alec's friends as Wouvermann's white horse. But no one knows the model.'

Armored's memory went back to the day when Roland made that sketch. She stood—so—just as the painter had drawn her, on a round boulder, the water boiling and surging at her feet and the white foam running up. Behind her the granite rock, grey and black. How could she ever forget that sketch?

‘Alec is wonderful in his seas,’ Philippa went on. ‘Look at the bright colour and the clear transparency of the water. You can feel it rolling at your feet. Upon my word, Armored, the girl is really like you.’

‘A little, perhaps. Yes; they are good pictures, Philippa. The man who painted them is a painter indeed.’

She sat down again, still bewildered.

Presently she heard Philippa's voice. ‘What is it?’ she asked. ‘You have become deaf and dumb. Are you ill?’

‘No—I am not ill. The sight of those pictures set me thinking. I will go now, Philippa. If he speaks to me I will reply so that there can be no mistake. But if he

persists in following me about, I will ask you to interfere.'

'If necessary,' Philippa promised her. 'I will interfere for you. But there is something in all this which I do not understand. Come again soon, dear, and tell me everything.'

When they began this talk, one girl was a little troubled, but not much. The other was free from any trouble. When they parted, both girls were troubled.

One felt, vaguely, that danger was in the air. Zoe meant something by constantly talking about her cousin Alec. What understanding was there between him and that woman—that detestable woman?

The other walked home in a doubt and perplexity that drove everything else out of her head. What did those pictures mean? Had Roland given away his sketches? Was there another painter who had the very touch of Roland as well as his sketches? No, no; it was impossible.

Suddenly she remembered something on the fragment of paper that Effie picked up.

The corner of the torn cheque—even the signature of Alec Feilding. What did that mean? Why had Roland torn up a cheque signed by Mr. Feilding? Why had he called that act the turning of the footstep?

## CHAPTER XI

## A CRITIC ON TRUTH

ONE painter may make use of another man's sketches for his own pictures. The thing is conceivable, though one cannot recall, and there is no record of, any such case. It is, perhaps, possible. Portrait-painters have employed other men to paint backgrounds and even hands and drapery. Now, the two pictures hanging in Philippa's room were most certainly painted from Roland's sketches. If there were any room for doubt the figure of Armored herself in the foreground removed that doubt. Therefore, Roland must have lent his sketches to Mr. Feilding. What else did he lend? Can one man lend another his eye, his hand, his sense of colour, his touch, his style? There was once, I seem

to have read, a man who sold his soul to the only Functionary who buys such things, and keeps a stock of them second-hand, on the condition that he should be able to paint as well as the immortal Raffaello. He obtained his wish, because the Devil always keeps his bargain to the letter, with the result that, instead of winning the imperishable wreath for himself that he expected, he was never known at all, and his pictures are now sold as those of the master whose works they so miraculously resemble. Armorel had perhaps heard this story somewhere. Could the cleverest man in all London have made a similar transaction, taking Roland Lee for his model? If so, the Devil had not cheated him at all, and he got out of the bargain all he expected, because he not only painted quite as well as his master, and in exactly the same style, so that it was impossible to distinguish between them, but, which the other unfortunate did not get, all the credit was given to him, while the original model or master languished in obscurity.



It was obvious to a trained eye, at very first sight, that the style of the pictures was that of Roland Lee. He had a style of his own. The first mark of genius in any art is individuality. His style was no more to be imitated in painting than the style of Robert Browning can be followed in poetry. Painters there are who have been imitated and have created a school of imitators: even these can always be distinguished from their copyists. The subtle touch of the master, the personal presence of his hand, cannot be copied or imitated. In these two pictures the hand of Roland was clearly, unmistakably visible. The light thrown over them, the atmosphere with which they were charged—everything was his. He had caught the September sunshine as it lies over and enfolds the Scilly Islands—who should know that soft and golden light better than Armorer?—he had caught the transparencies of the seas, the shining yellows of the sea-weed, the browns and purples of bramble and fern, the greyness and the blackness of the rock: you could

hear the rush of the water eddying among the boulders ; you could see the rapid movement of the sea-gulls' wings as they swept along with the wind. Could another, even with the original sketches lying before him, even with skill and feeling of his own, reproduce these things in Roland's own individual style ?

‘No,’ she cried, but not aloud ; ‘I know these pictures. They are not his at all. They are Roland's.’

Every line of thought that she followed—to write these down would be to produce another ‘Ring and Book’—in her troubled meditations after the discovery led her to the same conclusion. It was that at which she had arrived in a single moment of time, without argument or reasoning, and at the very first sight of the pictures. The first thought is always right. ‘They are Roland's pictures’—that was the first thought. The second thought brings along the doubts, suggests objections, endeavours to be judicial, deprecates haste, and calls for the scales. ‘They cannot,’ said the

second thought, 'be Roland's paintings, because Mr. Feilding says they are his.' The third thought, which is the first strengthened by evidence, declared emphatically that they were Roland's, whatever Mr. Feilding might say, and could be the work of none other.

Therefore, the cleverest man in all London, according to everybody, the best and most generous and most honourable, according to Armorel's companion, was an impostor and a Liar. Never before had she ever heard of such a Liar.

Armorel, it is true, knew but little of the crooked paths by which many men perform this earthly pilgrimage from the world which is to the world which is to come. Children born on Samson—nay, even those also of St. Mary's—have few opportunities of observing these ways. That is why all Scillonians are perfectly honest: they do not know how to cheat—even those who might wish to become dishonest, if they knew. In her five years' apprenticeship the tree of knowledge had dropped some of its baleful fruit at Armorel's

feet: that cannot be avoided even in a convent garden. Yet she had not eaten largely of the fruit, nor with the voracity that distinguishes many young people of both sexes when they get hold of these apples. In other words, she only knew of craft and falsehood in general terms, as they are set forth in the Gospels and by the Apostles, and especially in the Book of Revelation, which expressly states the portion of liars. Yet, even with this slight foundation to build upon, Armorel was well aware that here was a fraud of a most monstrous character. Surely, there never was, before this man, any man in the world who dared to present to the world another man's paintings, and to call them his own? Men and women have claimed books which they never wrote—witness the leading case of the false George Eliot and the story told by Anthony Trollope; men have pretended to be well-known writers—did I not myself once meet a man in an hotel pretending to be one of our most genial of story-tellers? Men have written things and

pretended that they were the work of famous hands. Literature—alas!—hath many impostors. But in Art the record is clean. There are a few ghosts, to be sure, here and there—sporadic spectres!—but they are obscure and mostly unknown. Armored had never heard or seen any of them. Surely there never before was any man like unto this man!

And, apart from the colossal impudence of the thing, she began to consider the profound difficulties in carrying it out. Because, you see, no one man, unaided, could carry it through. It requires the consent, the silence, and the active—nay, the zealous—co-operation of another man. And how are you to get that man?

In order to get this other man—this active and zealous fellow-conspirator—you must find means to persuade him to sacrifice every single thing that men care for—honour, reputation, success. He must be satisfied to pursue Art, actually and literally, for Art's own sake. This is, I know, a rule of conduct

preached by every art critic, every æsthete, every lecturer or writer on Art. Yet observe what it may lead to. Was there, for instance, an unknown genius who gave his work to Giotto, with permission to call it his own? And was that obscure genius content to sit and watch that work in the crowd, unseen and unsuspected, while he murmured praises and thanksgiving for the skill of hand and eye which had been given to him, but claimed by that other young man, Messer Giotto? Did Turner have his ghost? Sublime sacrifice of self! So to pursue Art for Art's sake as to give your pictures to another man by which he may rise to honour—even, it may be, to the Presidency of the Royal Academy, contented only with the consciousness of good and sincere work, and with the possession of mastery! It is beyond us: we cannot achieve this greatness—we cannot rise to this devotion. Art hath no such votaries. By what persuasions, then—by what bribes—was Roland induced to consent to his own suicide—ignoble, secret, and shameful suicide?

He must have consented : in no other way could the thing be done. He must have agreed to efface himself—but not out of pure devotion to Art. Not so. The Roland of the past survived still. The burning desire for distinction and recognition still flamed in his soul. The bitterness and shame with which he spoke of himself proved that his consent had been wrung from him. He was ashamed. Why? Because another bore the honours that should be his. Because he was a bond-man of the impostor. Of this Armored was certain. Roland Lee—the man whom for five long years she had imagined to be marching from triumph to triumph—conqueror of the world—had sold himself—for what consideration she knew not—hand and eye, genius and brain, heart and soul—had sold himself into slavery. He had consented to a monstrous and most impudent fraud ! And the man who stood before the canvas in public, writing his name in the corner, was—the noun appellative, the proper noun—belonging to such an act. And her own friend—her gallant hero

of Art—what else was he in this conspiracy of two? You cannot persuade a woman—such is the poverty of the feminine imagination—to call a thing like this by any other name than its plain, simple, and natural one. A man may explain away, find excuses, make suggestions, point out extenuating circumstances, show how the force of events destroys free will, and propose a surplice and a golden crown for the unfortunate victim of fate, instead of bare shoulders and the nine clawed cat. But a woman—never. If the thing done is a Lie, the man who did it is a——

‘Armored,’ said her companion—it was in the afternoon, and she had been dozing after her lunch—‘what is the matter? You have been sitting in the window, which has a detestable view of a dismal street, for two long hours without talking. At lunch you sat as if in a dream. Are you ill? Has anything happened? Has the respectable Mr. Jagenal robbed you of your money? Has Philippa been saying amiable things about me?’

‘I have found out something which has



disquieted me beyond expression.' said Armorerel, gravely.

Zoe changed colour. 'Heavens!'—she laughed curiously. 'What has come out now? Anything about me? One never knows what may come out next. It is very odd what a lot of things may be said about everybody.'

'My discovery has nothing to do with you, at least—no, nothing at all.'

'That is reassuring.' It certainly was, as everybody knows who does not wish the curtain to draw up once again on the earlier and half-forgotten scenes of the play. 'Perhaps it might relieve you, dear, if you were to tell me. But do not think I am curious. Besides, I dare say I could tell you more than you could tell me. Is it about Philippa's hopeless attachment for the man who will never marry her, and her cruelty to the reverend gentleman who will?'

'No—no: it is nothing about Philippa. I know nothing about any attachments.'

'Well, you will tell me when you please.'

Zoe relapsed into warmth and silence. But she watched the girl from under her heavy eyelids. Something had happened—something serious. Armored pursued her meditations, but in a different line. She now remembered that the leader in this Fraud was the man whom Zoe professed to honour above all other living men: could she tell this disciple what she had discovered? One might as well inform Kadysha that her prophet Mohammed was an epileptic impostor. And, again, he was Philippa's first cousin, and she regarded him with pride, if not—as Zoe suggested—with a warmer feeling still. How could she bring this trouble upon Philippa?

And, again, it was Roland's secret. How could she reveal a thing which would cover him with ridicule and discredit for the rest of his life? She must be silent for the sake of everybody.

'Zoe,' she sprang to her feet, 'don't ask me anything more. Forget what I said. It is not my own secret.'

'My dear child,' Zoe murmured, 'if no-

body has run away with your money, and if you have found out no mares' nests about me, I don't mind anything. I have already quite forgotten. Why should I remember?'

'Of course,' Armorel repeated impatiently—this companion of hers often made her impatient—'there is nothing about you. It concerns——'

'Mr. Feilding.'

It was only an innocent maid who opened the door to announce an afternoon caller; but Armorel started, for really it was the right completion to her sentence, though not the completion she meant to make.

He came in—the man of whom her mind was full—tall, handsome, calm, and self-possessed. Authority sat, visible to all, upon his brow. His dress, his manner, his voice, proclaimed the man who had succeeded—who deserved to succeed. Oh! how could it be possible?

Armorel mechanically gave him her hand, wondering. Then, quite in the old style, and as a survival of Samson Island, there passed

rapidly through her mind the whole procession of those texts which refer to liars. For the moment she felt curious and nervously excited, as one who should talk with a man condemned. Then she came back to London and to the exigencies of the situation. Yet it was really quite wonderful. For he sat down and began to talk for all the world as if he was a perfectly truthful person: and she rang the bell for tea, and poured it out for him, as if she knew nothing to the contrary. That he, being what he was, should so carry himself; that she, who knew everything, should sit down calmly and put milk and sugar in his tea, were two facts so extraordinary that her head reeled.

Presently, however, she began to feel amused. It was like knowing beforehand, so that the mind is free to think of other things, the story and the plot of a comedy. She considered the acting and the make-up. And both were admirable. The part of successful genius could not be better played. One has known genius too modest to accept the

position, happiest while sitting in a dark corner. Here, however, was genius stepping to the front and standing there boldly in sight of all, as if the place was his by the double right of birth and of conquest.

He sat down and began to talk of Art. He seldom, indeed, talked about anything else. But Art has many branches, and he talked about them all. To-day, however, he discoursed on drawing and painting. He was accustomed to patient listeners, and therefore he assumed that his discourse was received with respect, and did not observe the pre-occupied look on the face of the girl to whom he discoursed—for Zoe made no pretence of listening, except when the conversation seemed likely to take a personal turn. Nor did he observe how from time to time Armorel turned her eyes upon him—eyes full of astonishment—eyes struck with amazement.

Presently he descended for awhile from the heights of principle to the lower level of personal topic. ‘Mrs. Elstree tells me,’ he said, smiling with some condescension, ‘that

you paint—of course as an amateur—as well as play. If you can draw as well as you can play you are indeed to be envied. But that is, perhaps, too much to be expected. Will you show me some of your work? And will you—without being offended—suffer me to be a candid critic?’

Armored went gravely to her own room and returned with a small portfolio full of drawings which she placed before him, still with the wonder in her eyes. What would he say—this man who passed off another man's pictures for his own? She stood at the table over him, looking down upon him, waiting to see him betray himself—the first criminal person—the first really wicked man—she had ever encountered in the flesh.

‘You are not afraid of the truth?’ he asked, turning over the sketches. ‘In Art—truth—truth is everything. Without truth there is no Art. Truth and sincerity should be our aim in criticism as well as in Art itself.’

Oh! what kind of conscience could this

man have who was able so to talk about Art, seeing what manner of man he was? Armorel glanced at Zoe, half afraid that he would convict himself in her presence. But she seemed asleep, lying back in her cushions.

His remarks were judgments. Once pronounced, there was no appeal. Yet his judgments produced no effect upon the girl, not the least. She listened, she heard, she acquiesced in silence.

Perhaps because he was struck with her coldness he left off examining the sketches, and began a learned little discourse about composition and harmony, selection and grouping. He illustrated these remarks, not obtrusively, but quite naturally, by referring to his own pictures, appealing to Zoe, who lazily raised her head and murmured response, as one who knew it all beforehand. Now, as to the discourse itself, Armorel recognised every word of it already: she had read and had been taught these very things. It showed, she thought, what a pretender the man must be not to understand work that

had been done by one who had studied seriously, and already knew all that he was laboriously enforcing. But she said nothing. It was, moreover, the lesson of a professor, not of an artist. Between the professional critic who can neither paint nor draw and the smallest of the men who can paint and draw there is, if you please, a gulf fixed that cannot be passed over.

‘This drawing, for instance,’ he concluded, taking up one from the table, ‘betrays exactly the weakness of which I have been speaking. It has some merit. There is a desire for truth—without truth what are we? The lights are managed with some dexterity, the colour has real feeling. But consider this figure. From sheer ignorance of the elementary considerations which I have been laying down, you have placed it exactly in front. Had it been here, at the right, the effect of the figure in bringing up the whole of the picture would have been heightened tenfold. For my own part, I always like a figure in a painting—a single figure for choice—a girl,



because the treatment of the hair and the dress lends itself to effect.'

'His famous girl!' echoed Zoe. 'That model whom nobody is allowed to see!'

Now, the figure was placed in the middle for very excellent reasons, and in full consideration of those very principles which this expounder had been setting forth. But what yesterday would have puzzled her, now amused her one moment and irritated her the next.

He took up a crayon. 'Shall I show you,' he asked, 'exactly what I mean?'

'If you please. Here is a piece of paper which will do.'

He spoke in the style which Matthew Arnold so much admired—the Grand Style—the words clear and articulate, the emphasis just, the manner authoritative. 'I will just indicate your background,' he said, poising the pencil professionally—he looked as if the Grand Style really belonged to him—'in two or three strokes, and then I will sketch in your figure in the place—here—where it

properly belongs. You will see immediately, though, of course—your eye—cannot——’ He played with the chalk as one considering where to begin—but he did not begin. Armorel remembered a certain day when Roland gave her his first lesson, pencil in hand. Never was that pencil idle: it moved about of its own accord: it was drawing all the time: it seemed to be drawing out of its own head. Mr. Feilding, on the other hand, never touched the paper at all. His pencil was dumb and lifeless. But Armorel waited anxiously for him to begin. Now, at any rate, she should see if he could draw. She was disappointed. The clock on the over-mantel suddenly struck six. Mr. Feilding dropped the crayon. ‘Good heavens!’ he cried. ‘You make one forget everything, Miss Rosevean. We must put off the rest of this talk for another day. But you will persevere, dear young lady, will you not? Promise me that you will persevere. Even if the highest peak cannot be attained—we may not all reach that height—it is something to stand

upon the lower slope, if it is only to recognise the greatness of those who are above and the depths below—how deep they are!—of the world which knows no art. Persevere—persevere! I will call again and help you, if I may.’ He pressed her hand warmly, and departed.

‘I really think,’ said Zoe, ‘that he believes you worth teaching, Armorel. I have never known him give so much time to any one girl before. And if you only knew how they flock about him!’

‘Zoe,’ said Armorel, without answering this remark, ‘you have seen all Mr. Feilding’s pictures, have you not?’

‘I believe, all.’

‘Do they all treat the same subject?’

‘Up to the present, he has exhibited nothing but sea and coast pieces, headlands, low tide on the rocks, and so forth. Always with this black-haired girl—something like you, but not much more than a child.’

‘Did you ever see him actually at work?’

‘You mean working at an unfinished

thing? No; never. He cannot endure anyone in his studio while he is at work.'

'Did he ever draw anything for you—any pen-and-ink sketch—pencil sketch? Have you got any of his sketches—rough things?'

'No. Alec has a secretive side to his character. It comes out in odd ways. No one suspected that he could paint, or even draw, until, three or four years ago, he suddenly burst upon us with a finished picture; and then it came out that he had been secretly drawing all his life, and studying seriously for years. Where he will break out next, I don't know.'

'He may break out anywhere,' said Armorel, 'except upon the fiddle. I think that he will never play the fiddle. Yes, Zoe, he really is a very, very clever man. He is certainly the very cleverest man in all London.'

## CHAPTER XII

## TO MAKE THAT PROMISE SURE

THERE are few instincts and impulses of imperfect human nature more deeply rooted or more certain to act upon us than the desire to 'have it out' with some other human creature. Women are especially led or driven by this impulse, even among the less highly civilised to the tearing out of nose- and ear-rings. You may hear every day at all hours in every back street of every city the ladies having it out with each other. In fact there is a perpetual court of Common Pleas being held in these streets, without respite of holiday or truce, in which the folk have it out with each other, while friends—sympathetic friends—stand by and act as judges, jury, arbitrators, lawyers, and all. Things are reported,

things are said, things are done, a personal explanation is absolutely necessary, before peace of mind can be restored, or the way to future action become clearly visible. The two parties must have it out.

In Armorel's case she found that before doing anything she must see that member of the conspiracy—if, indeed, there was a conspiracy—who was her own friend: she must see Roland. She must know exactly what it meant, if only to find out how it could be stopped. In plain words, she must have it out. Those who obey a natural impulse generally believe that they are acting by deliberate choice. Thus the doctrine of free will came to be invented: and thus Armorel, when she took a cab to the other studio, had no idea but that she was acting the most original part ever devised for any comedy.

As before, she found the artist in his dingy back room, alone. But the picture was advancing. When she saw it, a fortnight before, it was little more than the ghost of a rock with a spectral sea and a shadowy girl beside

the sea. Now, it was advanced so far that one could see the beginnings of a fine painting in it.

Roland stepped forward and greeted his old friend. Why—he was already transformed. What had he done to himself? The black bar was gone from his forehead: his eyes were bright: his cheeks had got something of their old colour: his hair was trimmed, and his dress, as well as his manner, showed a return to self-respect.

‘What happy thought brings you here again, Armorel?’ he asked, with the familiarity of an old friend.

‘I came to see you at work. Last time I came only to see you. Is it permitted?’

‘Behold me! I am at work. See my picture—all there is of it.’

Armorel looked at it long and carefully. Then she murmured unintelligibly, ‘Yes, of course. But there never could have been any doubt.’ She turned to the artist a face full of encouragement. ‘What did I prophesy for you, Roland? That you should be

a great painter? Well, my prophecy will come true.'

'I hope, but I fear. I am beginning the world again.'

'Not quite. Because you have never ceased to work. Your hand is firmer and your eye is truer now than it was four years ago, when you—ceased to exhibit. But you have never ceased to work. So that you go back to the world with better things.'

'They refused to buy my things before.'

'They will not refuse now. Nay, I am certain. Don't think of money, my old friend: you must not—you shall not think of money. Think of nothing but your work—and your name. What ought to be done to a man who should forget his name? He deserves to be deprived of his genius, and to be cast out among the stupid. But you, Roland, you were always keen for distinction—were you not?'

He made no reply.

'How well I know the place,' she said, standing before the picture. 'It is the narrow



channel between Round Island and Camber Rock. Oh! the dear, terrible place. When you and I were there, you remember, Roland, the water was smooth and the sea-birds were flying quietly. I have seen them driven by the wind off the island and beating up against it like a sailing ship. But in September there are no puffins. And I have seen the water racing and roaring through the channel, dashing up the black sides of the rocks—while we lay off, afraid to venture near. It was low tide when you made your sketch. I remember the long, yellow fringing sea-weed hanging from the rock six feet deep. And there is your girl sitting in the boat. Oh! I remember her very well. What a happy time she had while you were with her, Roland! You were the very first person to show her something of the outer world. It seemed, when you were gone, as if you had taken that girl and planted her on a high rock so that she could see right across the water to the world of men and Art. You always keep this girl in your pictures?’

‘Always in these pictures of coast and rock.’

‘Roland, I want you to make a change. Do not paint the girl of sixteen in this picture. Let me be your model instead. Put me into the picture. It is my fancy. Will you let me sit for you again?’

‘Surely, Armorel, if I may. It will be—oh, but you cannot—you must not come to this den of a place.’

‘Indeed, I think it is not a nice place at all. But I shall stipulate that you take another and a more decent studio immediately. Will you do this?’

‘I will do anything—anything—that you command.’

‘You know what I want. The return of my old friend. He is on his way back already.’

‘I know—I know. But whether he ever can come back again I know not. A shade or spectre of him, perhaps, or himself, besmirched and smudged, Armorel—dragged through the mud.’

‘No. He shall come back—himself—in spotless robes. Now you shall take a studio, and I will come and sit to you. I may bring my little friend Effie Wilmot, with me? That is agreed, then. You will go, Sir, this very morning and find a studio. Have you gone back to your old friends?’

‘Not yet. I had very few friends. I shall go back to them when I have got work to show. Not before.

‘I think you should go back as soon as you have taken your new studio. It will be safer and better. You have ~~been~~ too much alone. And there is another thing—a very important thing—the other night you made me a promise. You tore up something that looked like a cheque. And you assured me that this meant nothing less than a return to the old paths.’

‘When I tore up that accursed cheque, Armorel, I became a free man.’

‘So I understood. But when one talks of free men one implies the existence of the master or owner of men who are not free.

Have you signified to that master or owner your intention to be his bondman no longer?’

‘No. I have not.’

‘This man, Roland,’ she laid her hand on his, ‘tell me frankly, has he any hold upon you?’

‘None.’

‘Can he injure you in any way? Can he revenge himself upon you? Is there any old folly or past wickedness that he can bring up against you?’

‘None. I have to begin the world again: that is the outside mischief.’

‘All your pictures you have sold to this man, Roland, with me in every one?’

‘Yes, all. Spare me, Armorel! With you in every one. Forgive me, if you can!’

‘I understand now, my poor friend, why you were so cast down and ashamed. What? You sold your genius—your holy, sacred genius—the spirit that is within you! You flung yourself away—your name, which is yourself—you became nothing, while this man pretends that the pictures—yours—were his!

He puts his name to them, not your own—he shows them to his friends in the room that he calls his studio—he sends them to the exhibition as his own—and yet you have been able to live! Oh, how could you?—how could you? Oh! it was shameful—shameful—shameful! How could you, Roland? Oh, my master!—I have loaded you with honour—oh, how could you?—how could you?’

The vehemence of her indignation soon revived the old shame. Roland hung his head.

‘How could I?’ he repeated. ‘Yes, say it again—ask the question a thousand times—how could I?’

‘Forgive me, Roland! I have been thinking about it continually. It is a thing so dreadful, and yesterday something—an unexpected something—brought it back to my mind—and—and—made me understand more what it meant. And oh, Roland, how could you? I thought, before, that you had only idled and trifled away your time; but now I

know. And again—again—again—how could you?’

‘It is no excuse—but it is an explanation—I do not defend myself. Not the least in the world—but. . . . Armored, I was starving.’

‘Starving?’

‘I could not sell my pictures. No one wanted them. The dealers would give me nothing but a few shillings apiece for them. I was penniless, and I was in debt. A man who drops into London out of Australia has no circle of friends and cousins who will stand by him. I was alone. Perhaps I loved too well the luxurious life. I tried for employment on the magazines and papers, but without success. In truth, I knew not where to look for the next week’s rent and the next week’s meals. I was a Failure, and I was penniless. Do you ask more?’

‘Then the man came——’

‘He came—my name was worth nothing—he asked me to suppress it. My work—which no one would buy—he offered to buy

for what seemed, in my poverty, substantial prices if I would let him call it his own. What was the bargain? A life of ease against the bare chance of a name with the certainty of hard times. I was so desperate that I accepted.'

'You accepted. Yes. . . . But you might have given it up at any moment.'

'To be plunged back again into the penniless state. For the life of ease, mark you, brought no ease but a bare subsistence. Only quite lately, terrified by the success of the last picture, my employer has offered to give me two thirds of all he gets. The cheque you saw me tear up and burn was the first considerable sum I have ever received. It is gone, and I am penniless again——'

'And now that you are penniless?'

'Now I shall pawn my watch and chain and everything else that I possess. I shall finish this picture, and I will sell it for what the dealers will give me for it. Too late, this year, for exhibition. And so . . . we shall see. If the worst comes I can carry a pair

of boards up and down Piccadilly, opposite to the Royal Academy, and dream of the artistic life that once I hoped would be my own.'

'You will do better than that, Roland,' said Armorel, moved to tears. 'Oh! you will make a great name yet. But this man—don't tell me his name. Roland, promise me, please, not to tell me his name. I want you—just now—to think that it is your own secret—to yourself. If I should find it out, by accident, that would be—just now—my secret—to myself. This man—you have not yet broken with him?'

'Not yet.'

'Will you go to him and tell him that it is all over? Or will you write to him?'

'I thought that I would wait, and let him come to me.'

'I would not, if I were you. I would write and tell him at once, and plainly. Sit down, Roland, and write now—at once—without delay. Then you will feel happier.'

'I will do what you command me,' he



replied meekly. He had, indeed, resolved with all his might and main that the rupture should be made; but, as yet, he had not made it.

‘Get paper, then, and write.’

He obeyed, and sat down. ‘What shall I say?’ he asked.

‘Write: “After four years of slavery, I mean to become a man once more. Our compact is over. You shall no longer put your name to my works; and I will no longer share in the infamy of this fraud. Find, if you can, some other starving painter, and buy him. I have torn up your cheque, and I am now at work on a picture which will be my own. If there is any awkwardness about the subject and the style, in connection with the name upon it, that awkwardness will be yours, not mine.” So—will you read it aloud? I think,’ said Armorer, ‘that it will do. He will probably come here and bluster a little. He may even threaten. He may weep. You will—Roland—are you sure—you will be adamant?’

‘I swear, Armorel! I will be true to my promise.’

Armorel heaved a sigh. Would he stand steadfast? He might have much to endure. Would he be able to endure hardness? It is only the very young man who can be happy in a garret and live contentedly on a crust. At twenty-six or twenty-seven, the age at which Roland had now arrived, one is no longer quite so young. The garret is dismal: the crust is insipid, unless there are solid grounds for hope. Yet he had the solid grounds of improved work—good work.

‘Should you be afraid of him?’ she asked.

‘Afraid of him?’ Roland laughed. ‘Why, I never meet him but I curse him aloud. Afraid of him? No. I have never been afraid of anything but of becoming penniless. Poverty—destitution—is an awful spectre. And not only poverty but—I confess, with shame——’

‘Oh! man of little faith’—she did not

want to hear the end of that confession—‘you could not endure a single hour. You did this awful thing for want of money.’

‘I did,’ said Roland, meekly.

‘The Way of Pleasure and the Way of Wealth. I remember—you told me long ago—they draw the young man by ropes. But not the girl. Why not the girl? I have never felt this strange yearning for riot and excess. In all the poetry, the novels, the pictures, and the plays the young men are always being dragged by ropes to the Way of Pleasure. Are men so different from women? What does it mean—this yearning? I cannot understand it. What is your Way of Pleasure that it should attract you so? Your poetry and your novels cannot explain it. I see feasting in the Way of Pleasure, drinking, singing, dancing, gambling, sitting up all night, and love-making. As for work, there is none. Why should the young man want to feast? It is like a City Alderman to be always thinking of banquets. Why should

you want to drink wine perpetually? I suppose you do not actually get tipsy. If you can sing and like singing, you can sing over your work, I suppose. As for love-making'—she paused. The subject, where a young man and a maiden discuss it, has to be treated delicately. 'I have always supposed'—she added, with hesitation, for experience was lacking—'that two people fall in love when they are fitted for each other. But in this, your wonderful Way of Pleasure, the poets write as if every man was always wanting to make love to every woman if she is pleasant to look at, and without troubling whether she is good or bad, wise or silly. Oh! every woman! any woman! there is neither dignity of manhood nor self-respect nor respect to woman in this folly.'

'You cannot understand any of it, Armorel,' said Roland. 'We ought all of us to be flogged from Newgate to Tyburn.'

'That would not make me understand. Flora, Chloe, Daphne, Amaryllis—they are all the same to the poet. A pretty girl

seems all that he cares for. Can that be love ?’

‘—And back again,’ said Roland.

‘Still I should not understand. In the poetry I think that love-making comes first, and eating and drinking afterwards. As for love-making—she spoke philosophically, as one in search of truth—‘as for love-making, I believe I could wait contentedly without it until I found exactly the one man I could love. But that I should take a delight in writing or singing songs about making love to every man who was a handsome fellow—any man—every man—oh! can one conceive such a thing? There is but one Way of Pleasure to such as you, Roland. If I could paint so good a picture as this is going to be, it would be a lifelong joy. I should never, never, never tire of it. I should want no other pleasure—nothing better—than to work day after day, to work and study, to watch and observe, to feel the mastery of hand and eye. Oh! Roland—with this before you—with this’—she pointed to

the picture—‘you sold your soul—you—you  
—you!—for feasting and drinking and—and  
—perhaps——’

‘No, Armored: no. Everything else if  
you like, but not love-making.’

## CHAPTER XIII

## THE DRAMATIST

IF Mrs. Elstree was Armorel's official and authorised companion, her private unpaid companion was Effie Wilmot. The official companion was resident in the chambers, and was seen with her charge at the theatres and concerts. The private unpaid companion went about with her all day long, sat with her in her own room, knew what she thought, and talked with her of the things she loved to discuss. So that, though the representative of Order and Propriety had less to do, the unpaid attachée had a much more lively time. Fortunately, the official companion was best pleased when there was nothing to do. In those days, when London was as yet an unknown land to both of them, the girls

went together to see things. Nobody knows what a great quantity of things there are to see in London when you once set yourself seriously to explore this great unknown continent. Captain Magalhaens himself, crossing the Pacific Ocean for the first time, did not experience a more interesting and exciting time than these two girls in their walks in and about the great town, new to both. They were as ravenous as American tourists beginning their European round. And, like them, they consulted their Baedeker, their Hare, and their Peter Cunningham. Pictures there are, all in the West-End; museums, with every kind of treasure; historic houses—alas! not many; libraries; art galleries of all kinds; cathedrals, churches, ancient and modern; old streets, whose paving-stones are inscribed in the closest print with the most wonderful recollections; old sites, broken fragments, even. Every morning the two girls wandered forth, sometimes not coming home until late in the afternoon. Then Effie went back to her lodging, and spent the



evening working at her verses ; while Armorel practised her violin, or read and dreamed away the time opposite her companion, who sat for the most part in silence, gazing into the firelight, lying back in her easy-chair beside the fire.

These ramblings belong to another book—the Book of the Things Left Out. I could show you, dear reader, many curious and interesting places visited by these two pilgrims, but one must not in this place write these down, because Armorel's story is not Armorel's history. Let us always be careful to distinguish. Besides, the events which have to be related destroyed, as you will see, the calm and tranquillity necessary for the proper enjoyment of such ramblings. First, this discovery concerning the pictures. Who can visit old churches and museums with a mind full of wrath and bitterness? So wrathful was Armorel in considering the impudence of the fraud she had discovered: so bitter was she in considering the cowardice of her old hero: that she even failed to observe

the unmistakable signs of trouble which at this time showed themselves in her friend's face. If not a beautiful face, it was expressive. When the projecting forehead showed a thick black line: when the deep-set eyes were ringed with dark circles: when the pale cheeks grew paler and more hollow: and when the girl, who was generally so bright and animated, became silent and *distracte*, something was wrong.

‘What is it, Effie?’ Armorel asked, waking up. ‘I have asked you three questions, and have received no answer. And you are looking ill. Has anything gone wrong?’

‘Oh!’ cried Effie, ‘it is horrid! You are in troubles of your own, and you want me to add to them by telling you about mine.’

‘I am in trouble, dear. And it makes me selfish and blind. You know partly what it is about. It is about the Life that has gone wrong. I have found out why and how. But I can never tell you or anybody. Never mind. Tell me about yourself.’

‘It is more about my brother than myself.

You know that Archie has been writing a play?’

‘Yes. You write verses which you have never shown me; and your brother writes plays. I shall see both some day, perhaps.’

‘Whenever you like. But Archie has now finished his play.’

‘Yes?’

‘That means to him more than I can possibly tell you. He has been living for that play, and for nothing else. It has filled his brain day and night. Never was so much trouble given to a play before, I am sure. It is himself.’

‘I understand.’

‘Well—then—you will understand also what he feels when he has been told that his play is utterly worthless.’

‘Who told him that?’

‘A great authority—a writer of great reputation—the only living writer whom we have ever known.’

‘Well—but—Effie, if a great authority says this, it is frightful.’

‘It would be, but for one thing, which you shall hear afterwards. However, he did confess that some of the situations were fine. But the dialogue, he said, was unfitted for the stage, and no manager would so much as look at the play.’

‘Poor Archie! What a dreadful blow! What does he say?’

‘He is utterly cast down. He sits at home and broods. Sometimes he swears that he will tear up the thing and throw it into the fire; sometimes he recovers a little of his old confidence in it. He will not eat anything, and he does not sleep; and I can find nothing to say that will comfort him. If I knew anyone who would give him another opinion—the play cannot be so bad. Armored, will you read the play?’

‘But, my dear, I am no critic. What would be the good of my reading it?’

‘I would rather have your criticism than’—she hesitated—‘than anybody’s. Because you can feel—and you have the artist’s soul; and everybody has not—though he may

paint such beautiful pictures,' she added rather obscurely.

'Well, I will read the play, or hear him read it, if you think it will do him any good, Effie. I will go with you at once.'

'Oh! will you, really? Archie will be shy at first. The last criticism caused him so much agony that he dreads another. But yours will be sympathetic, at least. You will understand what he meant, even if he has not succeeded—poor boy!—in putting on the stage what was in his heart. When he sees that you do feel for him, it will be different. Oh! Armored!'—the tears rose to her eyes—'you cannot know what that play has been to both of us. We have talked over every situation: we have rehearsed all the dialogue. I know it by heart, I think. I could recite the whole of it, straight through. We have cried over it, and laughed over it. I have dressed dolls for all the parts, and one of us made them act while the other read the play. And, after all, to be told that it is worthless! Oh! It is a shame! It is a shame! And it

isn't worthless. It is a great, a beautiful play. It is full of tenderness, and of strength as well.'

'Let us go at once, Effie.'

'What a good thing it was for me that the Head of the Reading Room sent me to you! I little thought I was going to make such a friend'—she took Armored's hand—'We had no friends—yes, there was one, but he is no true friend. We have had no friends at all, and we thought to make our way without any.'

'You came to London to conquer the world—such a great giant of a world—you and your brother, Jack the Giant Killer.'

'Ah! But we had read, somewhere, that the world is a good-natured giant. He only asks to be amused. If you make him laugh or cry, and forget, somehow, his own troubles—the world is full of troubles—he will give in at once. Archie was going to make him laugh and cry; I was going to tickle him with pretty rhymes. But you may play for him, act for him, dance for him, paint for

him, sing for him, make stories for him—anything that you will, and he will be subdued. That is what we read, and we kept on repeating this assurance to each other, but as yet we have not got very far. The great difficulty seems to make him look at you and listen to you.’

‘My dear, you shall succeed.’

The young dramatist was sitting at his table, as melancholy as Keats might have been after the *Quarterly Review's* belabouring. He looked wretched: there was no pretence at anything else: it was unmitigated wretchedness. Despair sat upon his countenance, visible for all to see: his hair had not apparently been brushed, nor his collar changed, since the misery began: he seemed to have gone to bed in his clothes. Trouble does thus affect many men. It attacks even their clothes as well as their hair and their minds. The manuscript was lying on the table before him, but the pen was dry: he had no longer any heart to correct the worth-

less thing. It was the hour of his deepest dejection. The day before he had plucked up a little courage: perhaps the critic was wrong: to-day all was blackness.

‘Here is Armorel, Archie!’ cried Effie, with the assumption of cheerfulness.

‘I have come to ask a favour,’ said Armorel, taking the hand that was mechanically extended. ‘I hear that your play is finished, and I am told that it is a beautiful play.’

‘No—it isn’t,’ said the author.

‘And that an unkind critic has said horrid and unkind things about it. And I want to read it, if I may. Oh! I am not a great critic, but indeed, Archie, I have some feeling for Art and for things beautiful. May I read it?’

‘The play is perfectly worthless,’ he replied sternly, but with signs of softening. ‘It is only waste of time to read it. Better throw it behind the fire!’ He seized the manuscript as he spoke, but he did not throw it behind the fire.



‘Is your critic a dramatist?’

‘No. He has never written a play that I know of. But he is a great authority. Everybody would acknowledge that.’

‘A critic who has never written a play may very easily make mistakes,’ said Armorel. ‘You have only to read the critiques of pictures in the papers written by men who cannot paint. They are full of mistakes.’

‘This man would not make a mistake, would he, Effie?’

‘Well, dear, I think he might, and besides, remember what he said at the conclusion.’ Armorel sat down. ‘Now,’ she said, ‘tell me first what the play is about, and then read it, or let Effie read it. I am sure she will read it a great deal better than you.’

He hesitated. He was ashamed to show his miserable work to a second critic. And yet he longed to have another opinion, because, when he came to think about it, he could not understand why the thing could be called worthless.

He yielded. He read, with faltering ac-

cents, the scenario which he had prepared with so much pride. Now it was like unrolling a canvas daubed for the scenery of Richardson's Show. He took no more pride in it.

‘Oh!’ cried Armorel, interrupting. ‘This seems to me a very fine situation.’

‘My critic said that some of the situations were fine.’

He went on to the end without further interruption.

‘Now, Effie,’ said Armorel, ‘you will read it aloud while your brother plays it with his dolls. Then I am sure to catch the points.’

Archie sat up, and began to place his dolls while Effie read. He was so expert in manipulating his puppets that he made them actually represent the piece, changing the groups every moment, while Effie, dropping the manuscript, folded her arms and recited the play, watching Armorel's face.

This was quite another kind of critic. It was such a critic as the playwright loves when he sits in his box and watches the

people in the house—a face which is easily moved to laughter or to tears, which catches the points and feels the story. There are thousands of such faces in every theatre every night. It is for them that the play is written, and not for the critic, who comes to show his superiority by picking out faults and watching for slips. For two hours, not pausing for the division of the acts, Effie went on, her soft voice rising and falling, the passion indicated but repressed; and Archie watched, and moved his groups, and the audience of one sat motionless—but not unmoved.

‘What?’ she cried, springing to her feet and clasping her hands. It is easy for this fine gesture to become theatrical and unreal, but Armored was never unreal. ‘He dared to call this splendid play—this glorious play—oh, this beautiful, sweet, and noble play!’—here Archie’s eyes began to fill, and his lips to quiver: he was but a young dramatist, and of praise he had as yet had none—‘he dared to call this worthless?’

‘He said it was utterly worthless,’ said Effie.

‘He said,’ Archie added, ‘that the language was wholly unfitted for the stage. And then—then—after he’d said that, he offered to give me fifty pounds for it.’

‘Fifty pounds for a play quite worthless?’

‘On the condition that he was to bring it out himself if he pleased, under his own name.’

‘Oh! but this is monstrous! Can there be,’ asked Armorel, thinking of the pictures, ‘two such men in London?’

‘If I would let him call it his own! He wants to take my play—mine—to do what he likes with it—to bring it out as if it was his own! Never! Never! I would rather starve first.’

‘What did you tell him?’

‘He said that he would wait for an answer. I have sent him none as yet.’

‘When you do,’ said Armorel, ‘let there be no hesitation or possibility of mistaking Oh! If I could tell you a thing that I know.

‘I will put it quite plainly. Effie, am I the same man? I feel transformed. What a difference it makes only to think that, perhaps, after all one is not such a dreadful failure!’ In fact, he looked transformed. The trouble had gone out of him—out of his face—out of his hair—out of his clothes—out of his attitude. Armored even fancied that his limp, day-before-yesterday’s collar had become white and starched again. That may have been mere fancy, but joy certainly produces very strange effects.

‘I would have sent an answer before,’ he said, ‘but it is so unlucky for Effie. This great man—this critic—is the only editor who would ever take her verses. And now, of course, he will be offended, and will never take any more.’

‘He shall not have any more,’ said Effie, with red cheeks.

‘Oh! But that would be horribly mean. Well, Archie, I will begin by taking advice. I know a dramatic critic—his name is Stephenson. I will ask him what you should

do next, and I will ask him about your verses, Effie, too—those verses which you are always going to show me.’

‘I tell her,’ said her brother, ‘that she will easily find another editor. You would say so too, if you were to see her verses. I am always telling her she ought to show them to you.’

The poet blushed. ‘Some day, perhaps, when I am very courageous.’

‘No—to-day.’ Archie opened a drawer and took out a manuscript book bound in limp brown leather. ‘I will read you one,’ he said.

‘Of course, you will say kind things,’ said the poet. ‘But you cannot deceive me, Armorel. I shall tell by your eyes and by your face if you really like my rhymes.’

‘Well, I will read one, and I will lend you the volume, and then you will see whether Effie hasn’t got her gifts as well as anybody else.’

He turned over the pages, selected a poem, and read it. The lines showed, first of

all, the command that comes of long and constant practice; and next, they were sweet, simple, and pure in tone.

‘Strange!’ said Armored. ‘I seem to have heard something like them before—a phrase, perhaps. Where did I read only the other day? . . . . Never mind. But, Effie, this is not ordinary girl’s verse.’

‘Oh! you really like it?’

‘Of course I like it. But it is so strange—I seemed to know the style. May I borrow the whole volume? I will be very careful with it. Thank you. I will carry it home with me. And now—I have thought of a plan. Listen, Archie. You know that many young dramatists bring out their pieces first at a *matinée*. Now, suppose that you read your piece, Archie, in my rooms in the evening. Should you like to do so?’

‘I read badly,’ he said. ‘Could Effie read or recite it?’

‘The very thing. Bring your dolls along and arrange your groups, while Effie recites. You will do that, Effie?’

‘I will do anything that will help Archie.’

‘Very well, then. We will get an evening fixed as soon as possible. I fear we shall have to wait a week at least. I will get my dramatic critic and a few more people, and we will have a private performance of our own. And then we shall defy this critic who said the piece was worthless—and then wanted to buy it and to bring it out as his own. I could not have believed,’ she added, ‘that there were two such impudent pretenders and liars to be found in the whole of London.’

‘Two?’ asked Effie, changing colour.  
‘There can be only one.’



## CHAPTER XIV

## AN HONOURABLE PROPOSAL

AT the same time Mr. Alec Feilding, whose ears ought to have been burning, was engaged in a serious conversation in his own studio with Armorel's companion. The conversation took the form of reproach. 'I expected,' he said—'I had a right to expect—greater devotion—more attention to business. It was not for play that you undertook the charge of this girl. How long have you been with her? Three months? And no more influence with her than when you began.'

'Not a bit more,' Mrs. Elstree replied. She had of course taken the most comfortable chair by the fire. 'Not a bit, my dear Alec. What is more, I never shall have any influence over her. A society girl I could manage. I

know what she wants, and how she looks at things. With such a girl as Armorel I am powerless.'

'She is a woman, I suppose.' He occupied a commanding position on his own hearthrug, towering above his visitor, but yet he did not command her.

'Therefore, you think, open to flattery and artful wiles. She is a woman, and yet, strange to say, not open to flattery.'

'Rubbish! It is because you are too stupid or too careless to find out the weak point.'

'To return, Alec: I have failed. I have no influence at all upon this girl. I have spent hours and hours in singing your praise. I have enlarged upon the absolute necessity of giving you a rest from business cares. I have proposed that she and I together—that was the way I put it—should buy a share in the paper, and that she should advance my half. Oh! I grew eloquent on the glory that two women thus coming to the relief of a man like yourself would achieve in after years. I

tried to speak from my heart, Alec.' The woman caught his hand, but he drew it away. 'Oh! you deserve no help. You are hard-hearted, and you are selfish: you have broken every promise you ever made me: you spend all that you have in selfish pleasures: you leave me almost without assistance——'

'When I have got you into the easiest and most luxurious berth that can be imagined; when I have asked you for nothing but a simple——'

'Yes, dear Alec, but you see that an honest acknowledgment would be worth all this goodness. Well, I say that I spoke from my heart, because in spite of all I was proud of my man—mine, yes, though Philippa still imagines, poor wretch!——'

'Do leave my cousin's name out of it, will you, Zoe?' he said, a little less roughly.

'I am proud of the man who is acknowledged to be the cleverest man in London.' She got up and began to walk about the studio. She stopped before the picture. 'Do you know, Alec—I am not a critic, but I

can feel a thing—that this is quite the best work you have ever done. Oh ! Those waves, they live and dance ; and those birds, they fly ; and the air is so warm and soft !—you are a great painter. Odd ! your girl is curiously like Armorel. One would fancy your model was Armorel at sixteen or so — a lovely girl she must have been then, and a lovely woman she is now.’ Zoe left the picture and began to look at the papers on the table. ‘What is this—the new story ? Is it good ?’

‘To you, Zoe, I may confess that it is as good as anything I have ever done.’

‘You are really splendid, Alec ! What is this ?’ She took up a very neatly written page in his handwriting. ‘Poetry ?’

‘Those are some verses for next week’s journal. I think there is no falling off there, Zoe.’

‘Have you got another copy ?’

‘There is the copy that has gone to the printers’.

‘Then I will take this. It will do for a

present—the autograph original draft of the poem—or I may keep it.’

‘Zoe, come back and sit down. We must talk seriously.’

She returned and took up her old position by the fire. ‘As seriously as you please. It means something disagreeable—something to do with money. Let us get it over. To go back to what we were saying, therefore. I cannot get you that money from Armorer. And at the very word of money she refers one to her lawyer. No confidence at all, as between friends who love each other. That is the position, Alec.’ She sat with her hands clasped over her right knee.

‘I must have some money,’ he said.

‘Then, as I have before remarked, Alec—make it.’

‘If one cannot have money, Zoe, one may get credit, which is sometimes just as good.’

‘I cannot help you in getting credit.’

‘Perhaps you can. You can help me, Zoe, by keeping quite quiet.’

‘Oh! I am always quiet. I have remained quiet for three years and more, while you flirt with countesses and cousins. How much more quiet do you wish me to remain? While you marry them?’

‘Not quite that, my child. But next door to it. While I get engaged to one of them—to one who has money.’

‘Not—Philippa.’

‘No—I told you before. What the devil is the good of harping on Philippa? You see, if I can let it be understood that I am going to marry an heiress, the difficulties will be tided over. Therefore I shall get engaged to your charge—Armored Rosevean.’

‘Oh!’ Zoe received this proposition with coldness. ‘This is a charming thing for me to sanction, isn’t it?’

‘It will do you no harm.’

‘I have certainly endured things as bad.’

‘You see, Zoe, one could always break off the thing when the time came.’

‘Certainly.’

‘And you would know all the time that it was a mere pretence.’

‘I should certainly know that.’

‘Well ; is there any other observation?’

‘You would make it an open engagement — go about with her — have it publicly known?’

‘Of course. The whole point is publicity. I must be known to be engaged to an heiress.’

‘And it would last——’

‘As long as might prove necessary. One could find an excuse at any time for breaking it off.’

‘Or I could.’

‘Just so. It really amounts to nothing at all.’

‘To nothing at all!’ Zoe neither raised her voice nor her eyes. ‘Here is a man who proposes to pretend love and to win a girl’s affections, when he can never marry her. He also proposes to throw her over, as soon as she has served his purpose. It is nothing at all, of course! Alec, you are really a wonderful man!’

‘Nonsense! The thing is done every day.’

‘No—not every day. If you are the cleverest man in London, you are also the most heartless.’

‘You know that you can say what you please,’ he replied, without any outward sign of annoyance. ‘Even heroics.’

‘But,’ she said, nursing her knee and swinging backwards and forwards, ‘we have forgotten one thing—the most important thing of all, in fact. My poor boy, there is no more chance of your being engaged to Armorel than of your entering into the Kingdom of Heaven.’

‘Why?’

‘Other girls you might catch : you are tall and big and handsome ; and you have the reputation of being so very, very clever. Most girls would be carried away. But not Armorel. She is not subdued by bigness in men, and she doesn’t especially care for a clever man. She is actually so old-fashioned—think of it!—that she wants—character.’



‘Well! What objection would that raise, I should like to know?’

Zoe laughed softly and sweetly.

‘Don’t you see, dear Alec? Oh! But you must let Armored explain to you.’

## CHAPTER XV

## NOT TWO MEN, BUT ONE

GREAT is the power of coincidence. Things have got a habit of happening just when they are most likely to be useful. It is not on the stage alone that the long-lost uncle turns up, or the long-missing will is found in the cupboard. And you cannot invent for fiction anything half so strange as the daily coincidence of common life. A tolerably long experience of the common life has convinced me of this great truth. Therefore, the coincidence which happened to Armorel on the very day when the young dramatist unfolded his griefs will not, by wise men, be thought at all strange.

It was in the evening. She was sitting with her companion, thinking over Archie

and his play. Was it really good? Was it good enough to hold the stage, and to command the attention of the audience? To her it seemed a singularly beautiful, poetical, and romantic piece. But Armored was of a lowly and humble mind. She knew that she had no experience in things dramatic. Had it been a picture, now——

‘Oh!’ cried her companion, suddenly starting upright in the cushioned chair where she was lying apparently asleep, ‘I had almost forgotten. My dear, I have got a present for you.’

‘From yourself, Zoe?’

‘Yes; from myself. It is a present which cost me nothing, but is worth a good deal. The making of it cost nobody anything. Yet it is a very precious thing. The material of which it is made is worth nothing. Yet the thing is worth anything you please.’

‘It must be a picture, then.’

‘It is a Work of Art, but not a picture. Guess again.’

‘No ; I will not guess any more. May I have it without guessing ?’

Zoe held in her hands a small roll of blue paper. This she now opened, and gazed at the writing upon it with idolatry : but it hardly carried conviction with it—perhaps it was a little overdone.

‘Least imaginative of girls,’ she said. It pleased her to consider Armorel’s refusal to join in that little scheme of hers as proving a lack of imagination. ‘I have brought you, though you do not deserve it, what any other girl in London would give—would give—a dance, perhaps, to obtain, and you shall have t for nothing.’

‘I want to hear what it is.’

‘It is nothing less, Armorel, nothing less—I got it to-day from the table in his studio—than an autograph : it is the copy used by the printers—an autograph poem of Alec’s ! An autograph poem, as yet unpublished.’

‘Is that all ?’ replied the least imaginative of girls. ‘You must not give it to me, really. You will value it far more than I shall.

Besides, I suppose it is to be published some day.'

'But the original manuscript—the autograph poem, dear child! Don't you know the value of such a thing? Take it. You shall be enriched in spite of yourself. Take it and put it aside somewhere in your desk, in some safe place. Heavens! if one had the autograph of a poem of Byron, for example!'

'Mr. Feilding is not Byron,' said Armorel, coldly. 'He may write pretty feminine verses, but he is not Byron. Thank you, however. I will take it, and I will keep it and value it because you think it valuable. I do not suppose the autograph verses of small poets are worth keeping; but still—as you value it' . . .

This was very ungracious and ungrateful. But she was really tired of Mr. Feilding's praises, and after the discovery of the pictures, and after the strange story she had heard only that morning—no; she wanted to hear no more, for the present, of the praises of this man—the cleverest man in London!

However, she unrolled the paper, and began to read the contents, at first carelessly. Then, 'Oh! what is this?' she cried.

'What is what?' asked Mrs. Elstree.

'This is a copy.'

They were the same words as she had used concerning the pictures. She remembered this, and a strange suspicion seized her. 'A copy,' she repeated, wondering.

'A copy? Not at all. They are the verses which are to appear in the next number of the journal—or the number after next. Alec's own verses, of course. Sweetly pretty, I think: what makes you say that they are copied?'

'I thought that I had seen them—something like them—somewhere before.' She went on reading. As she read she remembered the lines more clearly.

'What is the matter, Armorel?' asked Zoe. 'What makes you look so fierce? Heaven help your husband when you look like that!'

'Did I look fierce? It must have been

something that I remembered. Yes — that was it.'

'May I read the verses again?' Zoe read them, suspiciously. There was something in them which had startled Armorel. What was it? She could see nothing to account for this emotion. Certainly she was not fond of poetry, and failed to appreciate the fine turns and subtle tones, the felicitous phrase and the unexpected thought with which the poet delights his readers. In this little poem she could find nothing but a few jingling rhymes. Why should Armorel behave so strangely?

'What is it, my dear?' she asked again.

'Something I remembered — nothing of any importance.'

'Armorel, has Alec said anything to you? Has he—has he wanted to make love to you? Has he offended you by speaking?'

'No. There has been no question of love-making between us, and there never will be.'

'One cannot say.' Zoe looked at the matter from experience. 'One can never say.

Men are strange creatures ; and Alec certainly thinks a great deal of you.'

'I cannot imagine his making love—any more than I can imagine his painting a picture or writing a poem. Perhaps he would make love as he paints.'

'Well, he paints very well.'

'Very well indeed, I dare say.' She got up. 'I am going to leave you to-night, Zoe. I want to go to my own room. I have things to write. You don't mind?'

'My dear child, mind ! Of course, one would rather have your company. But since you must leave me'—she sank back in her chair with a sigh. 'Give me that book, dear—if you please—the French novel. When one has been married one can read French novels without trying to conceal the fact. They are mostly wicked, and sometimes witty. Not always. Good-night, dear. I shall not expect you back this evening.'

Armored, in her own room, opened the manuscript book of poems which Archie had given her, and found—the very last of all—



the lines which she had remembered. She laid the precious autograph beside Effie's poem. Word for word—comma for comma—they were exactly the same. There was not the slightest difference. And again Armorel thought of the two pictures.

Then she thought of the little dainty volume in white parchment containing the Second Series of 'Voice and Echo, by Alec Feilding.' She had tossed it aside, impatient with the man, when Zoe gave it to her. Now she looked for it, and found it after a little search. She opened it side by side with Effie's manuscript book. Presently she found the page in Effie's book which corresponded with the first page of the printed volume. There were about thirty or forty poems in the little book: in the manuscript book there were double that number; but the same poems followed each other one after the other in the same order, and without the difference of a single word, both in book and manuscript.

This discovery justifies my remarks about the common coincidences of daily life.

Again Armorel remembered that Zoe possessed another volume—the First Series of ‘Voice and Echo, by Alec Feilding.’ It was lying—she had seen it in the afternoon—in the drawing-room. She went in search of it, and returned without waking her companion, who had apparently fallen asleep over her novel.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Elstree was not sleeping. She was broad awake, but she was curious. She desired to know what it all meant: why Armorel was suddenly struck with hardness, why her cheek burned, and her eyes flashed; and what she wanted in the drawing-room. She perceived that Armorel had come in search of Alec’s first volume of verse. Oh! Alec’s first volume of verse. Now—what might Armorel want with that book?

At the end of March it is light at about half-past five. Everybody is then in their soundest sleep. But at that hour Mrs. Elstree came softly out of her bed-room, wrapped in a dressing-gown, her feet in soft slippers of

white wool, and looked at the books and papers on the table in Armorel's room. There was a manuscript volume of verse, professing to be by one Effie Wilmot. There were also two printed little volumes, bound in white-and-gold, containing verses by one Alec Feilding. Strange and wonderful! The verses in both books were exactly the same! Mrs. Elstree returned to bed, thoughtful.

Armorel, for her part, when she returned to her own room, compared the first series of poems, as she had compared the second, with the manuscript book. And the first series, too, word for word, was the same as the earlier poems in the book.

‘Good heavens!’ cried Armorel. ‘The man steals his verses, as he steals his pictures! Poor Effie! She is as bad as Roland!’

This was Thought the First. One has already seen how the three Thoughts treated her before. This time it was just the same. Thought the Second came next, and began to argue. A very capable logician is Thought

the Second, once distinguished for what Oxford men call Science. If, said Thought the Second, the manuscript and the volumes agree, it seems to show that Effie has copied the latter into her own book, and now tries to pass the poems off as her own. Such things have been done. If this was the case—and why not?—Effie would be, indeed, a girl full of deceit and desperately wicked. But then, how came Effie to have in her volume a poem hitherto unpublished, which was lying on Mr. Feilding's table? Yet, surely, it was quite as probable that the girl should deceive her as that the man should deceive the world.

Next. Thought the Third. This sage remarked calmly, 'The man is full of villany. He has deceived the world in the matter of the pictures. Why not also in the matter of the poems? But let us consider the character of the verses. Take internal evidence.' Then Armored read the whole series right through in the two little printed volumes. Oh! They were feminine. Only a woman could write

these lines. Womanhood breathed in every one. Now that the key was supplied, she understood. She recognised the voice, eager, passionate, of her friend.

‘They are all Effie’s!’ she cried again; ‘all—all. The man has stolen his verses as well as his pictures.’

This discovery, when she had quite made up her mind that it was as true as the former, entirely fell in with all that Effie had told her concerning herself. She had sold her poems all to one editor—he was the only editor who would ever take them—and now she was afraid that he would take no more. Why?—why?—because—oh, now she understood all—because he wanted to be a dramatist in the same way that he was a painter and a poet, and neither Archie nor his sister would consent! ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘he is, indeed, the cleverest man in London.’

Before she went to bed that night she had devised a little plan—quite an ingenious clever little plan. You shall hear what it was, and how it came off.

## CHAPTER XVI

## THE PLAY AND THE COMEDY

ARMOREL arranged for the reading of the play one evening four or five days later. It was a short notice, but she secured the people whom she wanted most, and trusted to chance for the others. She occupied herself in the interval in arranging the details and leading situations for a little comedy drama of her own—a play of some melodramatic force, in which, as in ‘Hamlet,’ a certain guilty person was to discover by a kind of dumb show that his guilt was known to her. It was to be a comedy which no one, except herself, was to understand. You shall see, directly, what an extremely clever little comedy it was, and how effective to the person principally concerned. She said nothing at all about this

comedy even to Effie. As for words, there were none. They were left to the principal character. This is, indeed, the ancient and original drama. The situations were, at the outset, devised beforehand. The actors filled in the dialogue. This form of drama is still kept up, and with vigour. When the school-boy sets the booby-trap, or sews up the shirt-sleeves, or greases the side-walk—if that old situation is still remembered—or practises any other kindly and mirthful sally, the victim supplies the words. The confidence trick in all its branches is another form of the primitive drama, and this evening's performance with reference to a certain person was only another example. You will hear, presently, what admirable dialogue was elicited by Armored's situations.

By half-past eight she had completed the mounting of her piece. First, for the reading of the play she placed a table at the side of the room, with a space at the back sufficient for a chair, or for a person to sit. A reading-lamp, with one of those silver cowls that

throw the whole light upon the table, stood at either end, illuminating a small space in the middle. This was for the manipulation of the dolls. For, though the people had been asked to come for a reading, Armorel had determined to try the experiment of a recitation, accompanied by the presentment of those puppets which Effie had dressed with such care, and her brother manipulated so deftly. Needless to say that more than one rehearsal had been held. In front of the table she placed a semicircle of chairs for some of her audience. At one side of the table was the piano: a music-stand, with a violin-case, gave promise of an overture. Between the music-stand and the table was room for a person to stand, and on the table a water-decanter and a glass showed that this was the place for the reciter. On the other side of the table, in the corner of the room, stood an easel, and on it a picture, with curtains arranged so that they could fall over and cover it up. The picture was lighted up by two lamps. The room had no other lights



in it at all, so that, if these two lamps were lowered or extinguished, the only light would be that thrown by the reading-lamps upon the table. As for the picture, it was as yet unfinished, but nearly finished. Of course it was Roland Lee's new picture. This evening, indeed, which professed to be the simple reading of a new play by a new writer, included a great deal more: it included, in fact, Roland's return to the arena he had deserted, and, as you shall see, the stepping upon the stage of both the twins, brother and sister. When one adds that Mr. Alec Feilding would be one of the company, you understand, dear reader, the nature of Armored's comedy, and the kind of situation devised and prepared by that artful and vindictive young lady.

‘How long will it take, dear?’ asked Mrs. Elstree, wearily contemplating these preparations.

‘I should say that the play will take an hour and a half or two hours to recite. Then there will be a little music between the acts. I dare say it will last two hours and a half.’

‘Oh, that will bring us to half-past eleven at least! And then it will be too late for anything else.’

‘We don’t want anything else to-night.’

‘No, dear. The play will be quite enough for us. I wish it was over. I am so constituted, Armorel, that I cannot see the least use in going out of my way to help anybody. If you succeed in helping people to climb up, they only trample on you as soon as they get the chance. If you fail, they are a burden upon you for life. These two Wilmot people, for instance: what are you going to do with them when you have read their play and stuff? You can’t get a manager to play it any the more for having it read. The two are no further advanced.’

‘Yes; I shall have made the young man known. He will be introduced. Mr. Stephenson promised to bring some critics with him, and you have asked Mr. Feilding to do the same. An introduction—perhaps the creation of some personal interest—may be to Archie of the greatest advantage.’

‘Then he will rise by your help, and he will proceed to trample upon you. That is, if the brother is like the sister. If ever I saw “trampler” written plain on any woman’s face, it is written on the great square block of bone that Effie Wilmot calls a forehead.’

‘They may trample on me if they please,’ Armorel replied, smiling.

The trampers were naturally the first to arrive. They were both pale, and they trembled, especially the one who was not going to speak. He came in, limping on his crutches, and looked around with terror at the preparations. One does not realise before the night comes what a serious thing is a first appearance in public. Besides, the strong light on the table, the expectant chairs, the arrangement of everything, presented an aspect at once critical and threatening. The manuscript play and the box of puppets were in readiness.

‘Now, Archie,’ said Armorel, ‘it is not yet nine o’clock. You shall have a cup of coffee to steady your nerves. So shall you,

Effie. After that we will settle ourselves.' She talked about other things to distract their thoughts. 'See, Effie, that is Roland Lee's new picture. It is not yet finished. The central figure is myself. You see, it is as yet only sketched in. I am going to sit for him, but he has caught a good likeness, has he not? It will be a lovely picture when it is completed, and I am going to give him permission to flatter me as much as ever he pleases. The scene is among the outer rocks of Scilly. We will go there some day and sail about the Western Islands, and I will show you Camber Rock and the Channel, and Castle Bryher and Menovawr and Maiden Bower, and all the lovely places where I lived till I was sixteen years of age. Are you in good voice to-night, Effie?'

'I don't know. I hope so.'

'She has eaten nothing all day,' said Archie.

'You are not really frightened, are you, Effie?' The girl was white with nervousness. 'A little excited and anxious. Will you have

another cup of coffee? A little jelly? Remember I shall be close beside you, with the play in my hand, to prompt. I like your dress. You look very well in white, dear.'

'Oh! Armored, I am horribly frightened. If I should break down, Archie's chance will be ruined. And if I recite it badly I shall spoil the play.'

'You will not break down, dear; you will think of nothing but the play. You will forget the people. Besides, it will be so dark that you will hardly see them.'

'I will try my best. Perhaps when I begin—Oh! for Archie's sake, I would stand up on the stage at the theatre and speak before all the people! And yet——'

'She had no sleep last night,' said her brother. 'I think, after all, I had better read it. Only I read so badly.'

Armored's face fell. She had thought so much of the reciting. Then Mrs. Elstree came to the rescue.

'Nonsense,' she said. 'You three people are making yourselves so nervous that you

will most certainly break down. Now, Mr. Wilmot, go into your own place. Set out your dolls. Here's your cardboard back scene.' She arranged it while Archie got himself and his crutches into the chair behind, and began to take the dolls out of their box. 'So. Now don't speak to your sister. You will only make her worse. And as for you, Effie, if you break down now you will be a most disgraceful coward. With your brother's future, perhaps, dependent on your courage. For shame! Pull yourself together!' Effie, thus rudely stimulated, and by a person she disliked greatly, lost her limpness and stood upright. Her face also put on a little colour, and her lips stiffened. The tonic worked, in fact. Then Zoe went on. 'Now,' she said, 'take up your position here. How are you going to stand? Fold your hands so. That is a very good attitude to begin with. Of course, you understand nothing of gesture. Don't try it. Change your hands a little—so—front—right—left—like that. And don't—don't—don't hold

your head like that, facing the crowd. Hold it up—like this. Look at the corner of that cornice—straight up. Oh! you will lower your head as you go on. But, to begin with, and at the opening of each act, look up to that corner. Remember, if you break down——’ She held up a forefinger, threatening, admonitory, and left her standing in position. ‘You will do now,’ she said.

‘Besides,’ said Armored, ‘no one will look at you. They will all be looking at Archie’s actors.’

The dramatist, relegated to the humble position of fantoccini-man, would be also in complete shade behind the table. He would not be seen, whatever emotion of anxiety he should feel. And for dexterity of manipulation with his puppets he could vie even with the firm of Codlin and Short.

The noise of cups and saucers in the dining-room proclaimed the arrival of guests. The first to come was Roland Lee, still a little shy, as Alexander Selkirk might have been, or Philip Quarles, or Mr. Penrose, on his

return to civilised society. He looked about the room. Mrs. Elstree—looking resigned—and Armorel, standing by the fire, and the two performers. Nobody else. And, in a place of honour, his unfinished picture.

‘It looks very well, doesn’t it?’ said Armorel. ‘I wish it was a little more complete. But it will do to show.’

‘Are you quite sure it is wise?’

‘Quite sure. The sooner you show everybody what you can do the better.’

‘I have found a new studio,’ he told her in low tones. ‘I have moved in to-day. It is among the old lot of men that I used to know a little. I have gone back to them just as if I had only been gone for a day. I don’t find that they have got on very much. Perhaps they spend too much time smoking pipes and cigarettes and talking. They chaff me, but with respect, because, I believe, they think I have been staying in a lunatic asylum. Respect, you know, is due to madmen and to old men.’

‘I hope it is the kind of studio you want.’



‘It will do. I am anxious to begin your sittings. When can you come?’

‘Any day you please. To-morrow. The next day. I can begin at once.’

Then came a small party of men—journalists and critics—captured by Dick Stephenson at the club, and bribed to come by the promise of an introduction to the beautiful Miss Armored Rosevean. I do not think they expected much joy from the amateur reading of an unacted piece. It is melancholy, indeed, to consider that though the preliminary and tentative performance of the unacted play—long prayed for—has been at last established, the promised appearance of the great dramatist has not yet come off—nay, the theatrical critic weeps, swears, and growls at the mention of a *matinée*, and when he is requested to attend one passes it on if he can to his younger brother in the calling. And yet such great treasures were expected of the *matinée*! However, they agreed to come and listen on this occasion. It shall be put down to their credit as a Samaritan deed.

‘Dick Stephenson,’ said Armorel, with an assumption of old friendship which filled him with pride, ‘I hope you are come here to-night in a really serious frame of mind—you and your friends.’

‘We are always serious.’

‘I mean that you are going to hear an ambitious piece of work. All I ask of you is to listen seriously, and to remember that it is really the work of a man who aims at the very highest.’

‘Will he reach the very highest?’

‘I do not know. But I am quite certain that there are very few artists, in any branch, who dare to aim high. Listen, and try to understand what the poet has attempted—what has been in his mind. Promise me this.’

‘Certainly, I will promise you so much.’

‘Thank you. It was for this that I asked you to-night. And see—here is your old friend Roland Lee.’ The two young men shook hands rather sheepishly—the one because he had been an Ass—a long-eared

Ass : and the other, because he was not guiltless of letting his friend slip out of his hands without a remonstrance and so away into paths unknown. 'I hear,' said Armorel, with her beautiful seriousness, 'that you two have suffered yourselves to drift apart of late. I hope that will be all over now. Oh ! you must never give up the early friendships. Have you seen Roland's new picture ? He has lent it to me for this evening. Come and look at it.'

'Why,' cried one of the men, 'it is an unfinished picture of Alec Feilding's !'

Roland turned hot and red.

'Not at all,' said Armorel. 'This is a sketch made in the isles of Scilly and in my presence, five years ago. As for the figure, you see it is not yet completed. I am the model. You remember Scilly, Dick Stephenson ? To be sure, you were not with us when we used to go sailing about among the rocks.'

'I have reason to remember Scilly, seeing that you saved my life there, and Roland's

too. But the picture is curiously in Feilding's style. Only it seems to me better than any of his. Old man'—he laid his hand on Roland's shoulder: it was the renewal of the ancient friendship—'old man, you've done the trick at last.'

Philippa came next, with her father and two or three girls. They, in their turn, called out upon the striking similarity in style. A few more people came, and it was a quarter past nine. But the man for whom Armorel had especially arranged her little comedy did not come. He was late. Perhaps he would not come at all.

'We must wait no longer,' said Armorel. 'Will everybody please to sit down?'

Philippa placed herself at the piano. Armorel took out her violin and tuned it. First, however, she made a little speech.

'I have asked you,' she said, 'to come this evening in order to hear a play read. It is a play written by a young gentleman in whom some of us take the deepest interest. I hope greatly that it will succeed. But we

want your judgment and opinion as well as our own. The play belongs to all time and to no time. The scene is laid in Italy, and in the sixteenth century ; but it might as well have been laid in London and in the nineteenth—only that we are more self-governed than a dramatist likes, and we conceal our emotions. It is a play of romance and of human passion. I entreat you to consider it seriously—as seriously as the author himself considers it. We have arranged for you a list of the *dramatis personæ*, with a little scenario of each act—there are three—and we think that if, instead of hearing it read, we have it recited, while the author himself plays the piece before us by puppets on this little stage, we shall get a clearer idea of the dramatic merits of the piece.’

This speech done, everybody took up the little book of the play and began to read the scenario, while Armored played an overture with Philippa.

She played a Hungarian piece, one of

the things that are now played everywhere—a quite short piece.

When it was finished, Roland lowered the lamps beside his picture, and covered them with crimson shades. Then there was no other light in the room but that from the two reading-lamps on the table. Just before the lamps were lowered Mr. Alec Feilding arrived, with half a dozen men whom he had brought with him. She saw his startled face as he caught sight of the picture as the lights were lowered. In the twilight she could still distinguish his face among the men who stood behind the chairs. And she watched him. Then Effie, who had not seen the latest arrival, took her place, and the play began.

The effect was new and very curious. The people saw a girl standing up beside the table—only the shadow of a girl—a ghostly figure in white—the spectre of a white face—two bright eyes flashing in the dim light. And they heard her voice, a rich, low contralto, beginning to recite the play.

It is not the nervous creature who breaks

down. He may generally be trusted. He lies awake for whole nights before the time arrives: he reaches the spot weak-kneed, trembling, and pale; but when the hour strikes he braces himself, stands up, and goes through with it. Effie had been partly pulled together, it is true, by the rough exhortation of Mrs. Elstree, but some credit must be given to her own resolution. She began with a little hesitation, fearing that she should forget the words. Then they came back to her: she saw them written plainly before her eyes in that friendly corner of the cornice: she hesitated no longer: in full and flowing flood she poured forth the dialogue, helped to right modulation by the strength of her own feeling and her belief in the beauty and the splendour of the drama. Armored meantime watched her man. He had seen the picture. Now he recognised the play, and he knew the reciter. As he stood at the back, tall above the rest, she saw his face change from astonishment gradually to dismay. It was rather a wooden face, but it passed plainly and successively through the

phases of doubt and certainty to that of dismay. Yes; dismay was written on that face, with discomfiture and suspicion. In a more demonstrative age he would have sat gnawing his nails: every wicked man, overtaken by the consequence of his own wickedness, used formerly to gnaw his nails. On the stage of the last century he would have turned upon his persecutors with a 'Death and confusion!' before he banged off the scene. We no longer use those fine old phrases. On the modern stage he would stand with straightened arms and bowed head, while the rest of the company pointed fingers of scorn at him, crushed but defiant. In Armorel's drawing-room he stood quiet and motionless, trying to collect himself. He saw, first of all, Roland Lee's new picture in the corner; he saw Roland Lee himself, no longer the negligent, despairing sloven, but once more a gentleman to outer view, and in his right mind. Next, he observed that Effie, his own poet, was reciting the play; and, thirdly, that the play was that for which he had himself made



a bid. Thus all three—painter, poet, and dramatist—were friends of this girl, Armorel ; and they had all three, he knew quite well, slipped clean out of his hands for ever, and were lost to him ; and all three, he suspected, had already related to each other the history of his doings and dealings with themselves. Therefore, while the play proceeded, his heart sank low—lower—lower.

There were three acts. When the first was finished Armorel stood up again and, with Philippa, played another little piece, but not long. And so between the second and the third.

Watching the people, Armorel became aware that the play had gripped them, and held them fast. No one moved. The little space upon the table between the two lamps, where the puppets stood before the painted screen of cardboard, became a scene richly mounted : it was a garden, or a dancing-hall, or an arbour, or a library, just as those little books told them, and the puppets were men and women. We want so little of mounting

to fire the imagination, if only the poet has the strength to seize it and to hold it by his words. Nothing, in this case, but a modulated voice reciting a dramatic poem, and, to help it out, a dozen dressed dolls, six or seven inches high, standing stiffly on a little stage. Yet, even when passion was at its highest, in the great scene of the third act, they were not ridiculous. Nobody laughed at the dolls. That was because the showman knew their capabilities. When they stood in their place, they indicated the nature of the situation and explained the words. Had he tried to make them act, he would have spoiled the whole. They made a series of groups—*tableaux vivants*, *poses plastiques*—constantly changed by the deft hands of the showman, finding relief in this occupation for the anxiety in his soul. For he, less fortunate than Effie, who had grasped the cheering truth, could not read in the circle of still faces before him their rapt and magnetised condition.

And now the end of the third act was neared. The reciter rose to the concluding

situation. Her voice, firm and clear, rang out in the dim light. The younger girls in the audience caught each other's hands. The 'lines' were good lines, strong and nervous, rapid and yet intense, equal to the strength and intensity of the situation.

At last the play was finished.

'Effie!' Armorel caught her in her arms, 'you have done splendidly!'

But the girl drew back. The honours of the evening were not for her, but for her brother: she stood aside.

Armorel took the cowls from the reading-lamps, and the room returned to light. Then the people began all to press round the dramatist and to shake hands solemnly with him, to murmur, to assure, to congratulate, and to prophesy. And the loud voice of Mr. Alec Feilding arose as he stepped forward among the first and grasped the young man's hand.

'Archie!' he said with astounding friendliness, 'this is better than I expected. Let me congratulate you! I have had the privi-

lege,' he explained to the multitude, 'of hearing this play—at least, a part of it—already. I told you, my dear boy, that your situations were splendid, but your dialogue wanted pulling together in parts. You have attended to my advice. I am glad of it. The result promises to be a splendid success. What say you?' He turned to a very well-known dramatic critic whom he had brought with him.

'If you can get the proper man to play the leading part,' he replied more quietly, 'the play seems to me full of promise. Frankly, Mr. Wilmot, I think you have written a most poetical and most romantic piece. It is valuable, not only for itself, but for the promise it contains.'

'For its promise,' repeated Alec Feilding blandly, 'as I told you, my dear boy, for its promise—its admirable promise. I shall not rest now until this play is produced—either at the Lyceum or at the Haymarket. Once more.' Again he grasped Archie by the hand. Then another and another fol-

lowed. It was not until the next day the dramatist recovered presence of mind enough to remember that Mr. Feilding had not given him any advice: that he had not said it was a work of promise: that he had offered to buy it for fifty pounds and bring it out as his own, with his own name put to it: and that no alteration of any kind had been made in it.

When Mr. Alec Feilding stepped back, he perceived that someone had turned up the lamps beside the picture. He was a man of great presence of mind and resource. He instantly stepped over to the picture and began to examine it curiously. Armorer followed him.

‘This is by my old friend Mr. Roland Lee,’ she said. ‘Do you know him? Let me introduce him to you.’ The men bowed distantly as those who, having met for the first time in a crowd, see no reason for desiring to meet each other again. That they

should so meet, with such an assumption of never having met before, struck Armorel with admiration.

‘The picture is a good deal in your own style, Feilding,’ said one of the critics.

‘Perhaps,’ replied the successful painter in that style, briefly.

‘It is taken from a sketch,’ Armorel explained, ‘made by Mr. Lee while he was staying at the same spot as myself. He made a great number at the time—which is now five years ago.’

Mr. Alec Feilding heard this statement with outward composure. Inwardly he was raging.

‘It is, in fact, exactly in your style,’ said the same critic. ‘One would say that it was a copy of one of your pictures.’

‘Perhaps,’ he replied again.

‘If,’ said Roland, ‘Mr. Feilding sends another picture in the same style for exhibition this year, I hope that the similarity of style may be tested by their hanging side by side.’

‘Shall you send anything this year—in the same style?’ asked Armorel.

‘I hardly know. I have not decided.’

The critic looked at the picture more closely. ‘Strange!’ he murmured. ‘One would swear . . . the same style—so individual—and belonging to two different men!’

Then Roland covered his picture over with the curtain. There had been enough said.

‘Now,’ said Armorel, ‘after our emotions and our fatigues of the play, we are exhausted. There is supper in the next room. Before we go in I want to sing you a song. I am not a singer, you know, and you must only expect simple warbling. But I want you to like the song.’

She sat down to the piano and played a few bars of introduction. Then she sang the first verse—it was Effie’s latest song, that which Mr. Feilding had accepted but not yet published.

He heard and recognised. This third blow finished him. He sat down on the nearest

chair, speechless. Mrs. Elstree watched him, wondering what was the matter with him. For he was in a speechless rage. Lucky for him that it was speechless, because for the moment he was beside himself, and might have said anything.

‘That is the first verse,’ said Armorel. ‘I have set it to an old French air which I found in a book. The words seem written for the music. There are two more verses.’

She sang them through. Her voice was pleasing though not strong: she sang sweetly and with feeling, just as she had sung in the old days on the shores of Samson, to the accompaniment of the waves lapping along the white sands, and she watched the man whom she had been torturing the whole evening through. Would not even this rouse him to some word or deed which might proclaim him a pretender and an impostor discovered? She knew, you see, that the lines were actually in type ready to appear as another poem by the Editor. She finished and rose. ‘Do you like the song, Philippa?’ she said. ‘I



have even had it printed and set to music. Anybody that pleases may carry away a copy. I hope everybody will, and keep it in remembrance of this evening. For the words are written by Miss Effie Wilmot, who has recited so beautifully her brother's play. We will share the honours of the evening between them. Archie, will you give me your arm? Roland—in her excitement she called him by his Christian name, which caused a little surprise—‘will you take Effie? Do you like the words, Mr. Feilding?’

‘Very much indeed. I had seen them before you, I think.’

‘Yes? Then you recognised them. You have seen other poems by the same hand, I believe?’

‘Good-night, Miss Rosevean. I have had a delightful evening.’ He retired without any supper. On his way out, he passed Effie. ‘You should have trusted me,’ he whispered hoarsely. ‘I expected, at least, common confidence. You will find that I have kept my promise—and you have broken yours.’

He passed on, and disappeared. Then they trooped in to the dining-room, where they found spread that kind of midnight refection which is dear to the hearts of those who are yet young enough to love champagne and chicken. And after supper they went back to the drawing-room and danced. Mrs. Elstree played to them—nobody could play a waltz better. Roland danced with Armorel. ‘You make me believe,’ he said, at the end of the waltz, ‘that I am really back again.’

‘Of course you are back again.’

‘Then Armorel danced with the critics, and talked about the play; and they all promised to go to great actors and speak about this wonderful drama. And so all went away at last, and all to bed, well content.

‘But,’ said Zoe, when the last was gone, ‘what was the matter with Alec? Why did he look so glum? What made him in such an awful rage? He can get into a blind rage, Armorel—blind and speechless. As for that, I would not give a button for a man

who could not. But what was the matter with him?’

‘Was he in a rage? Perhaps he wished that he had written the play himself. Such a clever man as that would be sorry, perhaps, that anything good was written, except by himself.’

Mr. Alec Feilding rushed down the stairs and into the street. He hailed a cab, and jumped into it.

‘Fleet Street! Quick!’

His printers, he knew, had work which kept them at work on Thursday nights till long past midnight. It was not too late to make a correction. His paper would be printed in the morning, and ready for issue by five o’clock in the afternoon. In fact, Effie received a note from him on Saturday morning :—

‘My dear Effie,’ he wrote, ‘I send you a copy of my new number. You will find, on looking into the editorial columns, that I have performed what I promised. Not only have I accepted and published your very

charming verses, but I have added a brief note introducing the writer as a débutante of promise. So much I am very pleased to have been able to do for you. Now, as one writer introducing another, I leave you with your public. Give them of your best. Let your first set of published verses prove your worst. Aim at the best and highest; write in a spirit of truth; let your Art be sincere and self-respectful.

‘I am sorry that this note, written on Tuesday, could not contain what I should much have wished to add, had I known it: that your verses have been adapted to an old air by Miss Armorel Rosevean. You did not, however, think fit to take me into your confidence.

‘I cannot hope to give you more than an occasional appearance in my columns. I should advise you, with this introduction of mine and the credentials of being published in my paper, to send verses to the magazines. I think you will have little difficulty with the help of my name in gaining admission.

‘Allow me to add my congratulations on your brother’s undoubted success. His play is admirable as a chamber play. It may also succeed on the stage, but of this it is impossible to be certain. Meantime, it is very cheering to find that he listens to the advice of those who have a right to speak, and that he follows that advice. It is both cheering to his friends and promising as regards his own future. I do not regret the time that I spent in advising upon that play.

‘I remain, my dear Effie,

‘Very sincerely yours,

‘ALEC FEILDING.’

The paper which contained the verses contained also the following paragraph:—

‘In place of the usual editorial verses—my editorial duties do not always give me leisure for the service of the Muse—I have great pleasure in inserting a set of verses from the pen of a young lady whose name is new to my readers. She makes her bow to my readers in this column. I venture, how-

ever, to prophesy that she will not long remain unknown. Wherever the English language is spoken, before many years the name of Effie Wilmot shall be known and loved. This is the prophecy of one who at least can recognise good work when he sees it.'

Effie read both letter and paragraph to her brother, who raged and stormed about the alleged advice and assistance. She also read them both to Armorel, who only laughed a little.

'But,' said Effie, 'he never helped Archie at all! He gave him no advice!'

'My dear, if he chooses to say that he did, what does it matter? Time goes on, and every day will make your brother rise higher and Mr. Feilding sink lower. And as to the verses, Effie, and your—your first appearance'—Effie turned away her shamefaced cheek—'why, we will take his advice and try other editors. Mr. Feilding is, indeed, the cleverest man in London!'

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



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